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# Church as the 'Hermeneutic of the Gospel'

A Study of the Themes of 'Message', 'Response', and 'Community' in Luke-Acts.

A Thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Theology

Peter Moore

Middlesex University

Supervised at London School of Theology

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# Abstract

Peter Moore, Church as the 'Hermeneutic of the Gospel', MTh

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The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the themes of 'message', 'response', and 'community', in Luke-Acts, with particular attention focused on John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Early Church. The 'message' sections will enquire into the content of the truth claim being made in the proclamation by these different characters. The 'response' sections will focus on what changes might be demanded of the people as a result of the articulation of these new realities. And the 'community' sections will address the communal implications that arise for those willing to respond positively. It will be argued that at each stage of the narrative there is an essential connection between the truth claim being articulated, the response demanded in light of these claims, and the shape of the community that is formed as a result. It will be demonstrated that these themes develop and progress alongside the narrative until the reader is presented with a picture of the Early Church in the summary passages of Acts that function as the model *par excellence* of their intended integration. For here, the people are said to welcome the message of God's salvation, respond in obedient repentance, and live lives of such deep fellowship that they are seen to embody the very reality proclaimed in the word of God. They become, as it were, the 'hermeneutic of the Gospel'.

# Acknowledgments

Acknowledgment of gratitude for this opportunity must begin where all things began, that is, with God. It was miraculous provision in fulfilment of a prophetic word that opened the door for me to enter this season of devoted study, and for that I am truly grateful. I also owe a great debt to all the faculty and staff at the London School of Theology, who have invested so much into me over my years here. I must also single out my supervisor Dr Conrad Gempf as particularly influential and worthy of my thanks: for from developing a passion for 'Acts' as a result of taking his classes as an undergraduate, to going on to spend time doing postgraduate research in this same book, he has been both a trusted guide and inspiration. To all my family and friends who have been a network of love and encouragement during this time, please know that you share in this small victory. But what can I say about my wife, Katherine? Her willingness to journey with me and shoulder the brunt of all the hidden and unacknowledged costs, has been a sacrificial gift whose cost is known to only a few. I love you Katherine Moore, and appreciate all that you are, and all that you do. Thankyou!

# Abbreviations

For a listing of abbreviations used, please refer to the ‘SBL Handbook of Style, Second Edition’. The abbreviated texts not covered therein are listed below.

BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
DBL	Swanson, James. <i>Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)</i> . Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.
L&N	Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i> . New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.
LXX	Septuagint
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
TDNT	Kittel, Gerhard, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964.

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# Introduction

‘How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross’? <sup>1</sup>

This was a question raised by missiologist Lesslie Newbigin as he wrestled with the church’s impact within an increasingly diverse and complex society.<sup>2</sup> Answering his own question he states that:

‘the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it’.<sup>3</sup>

His intriguing idea of the church as the hermeneutic of the gospel, by which I understand him to mean that it is a community of faithful believers that makes the gospel message both viable and visible,<sup>4</sup> helped to crystallise the subject matter of this paper. For whilst there are many studies on the individual topics of ‘gospel’ or ‘ecclesiology’, there are not many that explore how they might relate to, and inform, each other.

The aim of this paper is to use the narrative of Luke-Acts to explore the relationship between the truth claims articulated in the preaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the early church, the demand that these claims made upon those who heard their proclamation, and the consequential communal implications for the people of God.<sup>5</sup> It will be argued that throughout the narrative there is a symbiotic relationship between the truth claims being made, the response demanded, and the nature of the community that formed as a result.

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<sup>1</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), 227.

<sup>2</sup> Newbigin, 227.

<sup>3</sup> Newbigin, 227.

<sup>4</sup> Newbigin speaks of local congregations as a ‘sign, instrument, and foretaste of God’s redeeming grace for the whole life of society’. Newbigin, 233.

<sup>5</sup> Dividing the thesis into these three sections will undoubtedly raise echoes of Hans Conzelmann’s partition of Luke-Acts but this structure was not indebted to Conzelmann and is used as a simple taxonomy to explore continuity and discontinuity in the Narrative. See Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960). For a critique of his position see Charles H. Talbert, ‘Redaction Critical Quest for Luke the Theologian’, *Perspective (Pittsburgh)* 11, no. 1–2 (1970): 171–222.



To achieve these aims this paper will be broken down into three main chapters: one on John the Baptist, one on Jesus, and one on the early church. Each of these chapters will then be divided into a further three sections: one titled 'message', one titled 'response', and one titled 'community'. In the 'message' section of each chapter the goal will be to explore and articulate the core truth claims being made by the different groups as presented in Luke-Acts. In order to extrapolate these claims, the focus of the 'message' sections will be on examples of the proclamation of each of these characters, for it is here that we most clearly find an articulation of the 'message' that they were presenting.

So, for John the Baptist we will investigate what is meant by his preaching a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Luke 3:3) and how his message, presented as a fulfilment of Isaiah 40:3-5, spoke of the imminent judgement and salvation of God. The focus of the 'Jesus' chapter will be on his programmatic sermon in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21) and his use of Isaiah 61:1-2 to articulate his mission in terms of an eschatological jubilee. For the early church chapter, time will be spent on Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:14-36, which highlights the significance of the eschatological moment, the need to call on the Lord for salvation, and the confirmation of Jesus' identity as this Lord and Messiah.

The 'response' sections in each chapter seek to discover what sort of changes are now expected in the lives of the people as a result of the truth claims being articulated in the messages proclaimed. It will be argued that in each of these chapters, despite the differing narrative occasions, there is continuity in the demand that the people repent of their sins and reorientate their lives around the will of God. According to Luke-Acts, the people must demonstrate the integrity of their repentance by 'bear[ing] fruits worthy of repentance'. Throughout this narrative these 'fruits' take the form of concrete material practices, especially those concerned with generosity and justice toward one's neighbour (Luke 3:8, Acts 26:20). In the 'Jesus' chapter we will briefly explore those passages which explicitly mention 'repentance' terminology,<sup>6</sup> whilst recognising that the theme itself is often present even when the language itself is not.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 'repentance' (*metanoia/metanoeo*) and 'turn' (*epistrepho*).

<sup>7</sup> For a broader understanding of repentance that includes themes such as the welcome of sinners, the call to realign one's beliefs, aims and actions, the offer and requirement of a new heart, and the call to pick up one's cross and follow Jesus, as alternative examples of repentance, see Tobias Hägerland, 'Jesus and the

The rite of Baptism also plays a key role in the 'response' sections of the chapters on John the Baptist and the early church. However, whilst it is recognised that there are strong parallels between John's demand for a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3) and Peter's call for the people to repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38), each will be considered in turn and their meaning explored within their own context.

The 'community' sections will explore the communal implications of the 'message' and 'response' sections and argue that the result of an appropriate response to the preaching of the word of God is the formation of the true people of God. It will be suggested that there is something of an 'ecclesial' assumption running all through Luke's narrative that is deeply concerned with the identity and nature of God's people. As mentioned above, the truth claims being made by John, Jesus and the early church demanded a response from those who heard them and began to divide the people into those who submitted to these claims and those who rejected them (Luke 7:29-30, 12:49-53, Acts 2:41, 3:22-23). The surprising element in this theme is that those who might be understood as privileged members within the people of God are often presented as rejecting the invitation and threatened with exclusion, whilst those considered as outcast and marginalised are shown to be open to the good news and welcomed in to be part of the community (Luke 3:7-14, 14:1-24, Acts 2:41-47, 4:1-22).

So the 'message' section is largely concerned with the truth claims being made in the proclamation of each of the characters investigated, the 'response' section with the demanded that is expected in light of these claims, and the 'community' section with the nature and identity of the group that is formed as a result.

The limited scope of this paper meant being carefully selective in the material that was included and examined, and therefore some justification is warranted for the material that was chosen to be included at the expense of that which was not. In order to discover the core of what was proclaimed, what was expected as a response, and the resulting community, I have tried to use material that might be considered representative or programmatic within the narrative. However, these considerations

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Rites of Repentance', *New Testament Studies* 52, no. 2 (April 2006): 169; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 254.

only really apply to the chapters on Jesus and the early church because the material on John is so limited that all the relevant material is included within the discussion.

For the section on Jesus' message, his Nazareth sermon was chosen for its programmatic function in the narrative, which is evidenced by the following: the presence of a major Old Testament quotation;<sup>8</sup> the articulation of a divine commission;<sup>9</sup> the manner in which it previews the ensuing narrative;<sup>10</sup> the disclosure of God's purposes by a reliable witness;<sup>11</sup> the fact that it is the first public example of Jesus' preaching; that it represents earlier reports of such proclamation;<sup>12</sup> is referred to by later summaries;<sup>13</sup> and has been intentionally placed at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.<sup>14</sup> For the section of 'response' I have chosen to briefly explore those passages which explicitly mention 'repentance' terminology,<sup>15</sup> whilst, as mentioned above, it is recognised that the theme itself can be present beyond the use of such terms.<sup>16</sup> The justification for this is that the language of 'repentance' functions as something of a broad umbrella term within the narrative that encapsulates the other more specific responses demanded of the people.<sup>17</sup>

With regards to the section on 'community' within the Jesus chapter, the parable of the Great Banquet has been selected (Luke 14:15-24). The reason for this choice is that the

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<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 61:1-2.

<sup>9</sup> The commission articulated by the anointed Servant of Isaiah 61:1-2.

<sup>10</sup> The manner in which the text previews the following narrative will be explored in depth later as the paper explores the way that the text of Isaiah 61:1-2 is outworked in Luke's portrayal of Jesus' message and ministry, but broadly the themes of the Spirit, salvation and acceptance or rejection of Jesus are all present here.

<sup>11</sup> The reliable witness is Jesus himself.

<sup>12</sup> The extended episode of Luke 4:16-30 appears to expound on the condensed summary found in 4:14-15.

<sup>13</sup> See Luke 7:21-22 and Acts 10:38.

<sup>14</sup> Mark (6:1-6) and Matthew (13:53-58) omit any detail of the message preached and place the episode later in their Gospels.

<sup>15</sup> 'repentance' (*metanoia/metanoeo*) and 'turn' (*epistrepho*).

<sup>16</sup> For a broader understanding of repentance that includes themes such as the welcome of sinners, the call to realign one's beliefs, aims and actions, the offer and requirement of a new heart, and the call to pick up one's cross and follow Jesus, as alternative examples of repentance, see Tobias Hägerland, 'Jesus and the Rites of Repentance', *New Testament Studies* 52, no. 2 (April 2006): 169; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 254.

<sup>17</sup> This might be gleaned from the fact that in each of the passages examined there is a sense of generality about the way that repentance functions as response to Jesus' proclamation. In Luke 5:32 Jesus summarises his summons as a call to repentance, in 10:13 rejection of Jesus, his message, and his messengers is described as a failure to repent, that 11:32 the explicit response demanded in light of Jesus' proclamation is repentance, that the given remedy to avoid judgement is repentance 13:1-9, and that the parables of Luke 15 all point toward repentance as the proper response to Jesus' invitations. Thus, on each occasion 'repentance' acts as something of a summary sense that broadly describes what is expected of those who hear Jesus' proclamation.

parable itself addresses questions of who will, or will not, be part of the people of God and is itself nestled within a broader narrative that also addresses these concerns. For in Luke 13:22 we are given a short summary of Jesus' ministry by describing how he 'went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem', which provoked a listener to ask, 'Lord will only a few be saved' (13:23). Jesus does not give a direct answer to their question but instead challenges the people to make sure that they themselves will not miss out. He accomplishes this by evoking the image of the messianic feast and suggesting that some who might be expected to participate will not partake whilst other unexpected guests will (13:22-30). These questions and themes are then continued and expounded in the parable of the Great Banquet, for whilst Jesus does not give an explicit answer to the question as to the *number* of people who will be saved, he does suggest the *type* of people who will participate in the coming kingdom of God.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, given the fact that this parable is located within a broader context that has raised questions of inclusion and exclusion within the people of God and that the parable itself seeks to answer such questions, it is suggested that the text reflects in parabolic form the community beginning to develop as a result of Jesus' proclamation.

As it pertains to the material regarding the early church, I have chosen to include Peter's Pentecost speech (2:14-36), his demand that the people repent and be baptised (2:38), and the consequent summary passages (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35) due to the fact that Luke places representative material early on in his narratives which are then assumed or developed as the narrative progresses.<sup>19</sup> Thus it is argued that there are representative examples of the 'message', 'response', and 'community' elements all contained within the opening chapters of Acts. Beyond this, further reasons may be given as to why these texts function programmatically within Luke's second volume.

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<sup>18</sup> Ernst Wendland suggests that there is 'a deliberate intertextual connection' between Luke 13:22-30 and 14:15-24 and offers three lines of evidence: the first is that in both texts those expected to be included are actually excluded; the second is the harsh condemnation of the rejected group (13:27-28; cf. 14:9,24; 11:37-52); and the third is the presence of a saying that describes the counter-cultural nature of God's kingdom (13:30; cf. 14:11,21,23; 12:2-3, 22-23,51-53). He also highlights the similarity between 13:29 and 14:15. Ernst R. Wendland, "Blessed Is the Man Who Will Eat at the Feast in the Kingdom of God" (Lk 14:15): Internal and External Intertextual Influence on the Interpretation of Christ's Parable of the Great Banquet', *Neotestamentica* 31, no. 1 (1997): 167-68.

<sup>19</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), 170.

With regards to the speech, it is noteworthy that this is the first recorded evangelistic message in Acts and therefore probably typical of what was preached.<sup>20</sup> It should also be recognised that Peter stands as a representative spokesman for the community,<sup>21</sup> that the speech fulfils Tannehill's four-fold criteria for a programmatic text<sup>22</sup> and that it has strong echoes of Jesus' Nazareth sermon,<sup>23</sup> all of which suggest that Strauss is surely on the right lines when he calls the speech an example of 'the *apostolic kerygma* par excellence'.<sup>24</sup>

Peter's following command that the people repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins so that they might receive the gift of the Spirit forms the basis of an expected response to the gospel in Acts (Acts 2:38). This is evidenced by the fact that this is the fullest account of any other described response to the gospel in Acts, and therefore it is reasonable to suggest that later, when one element or other is explicitly mentioned the others are assumed to be present also unless explicitly stated otherwise.<sup>25</sup> In suggesting this I am not arguing for a particular *ordo salutis* (for there are differing patterns in Acts), but rather that these elements form the fundamental matrix of an expected response to the early church's proclamation and when an element is said to be lacking, it is mentioned as an anomaly that needs to be rectified (i.e. Acts 8:16, 19:1-7).

For the 'community' section of the Early Church chapter the summary passages found in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35 were chosen due to the fact that there is a natural narrative flow from the truth claim being presented in Peter's speech, the imperatives demanded

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<sup>20</sup> Richard P. Thompson, 'Reconsidering the Pentecost Materials in Acts Ecclesiologically', *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 13, no. 2 (2014): 4-5.

<sup>21</sup> Leo O'Reilly, *Word and Sign in the Acts of the Apostles: A Study in Lucan Theology* (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1987), 63.

<sup>22</sup> The Old Testament quotation can be found by Peter's use of Joel and Psalms 16 and 110. The divine commission is not explicit but is found in the way that the event and the speech are clearly linked to Jesus' commissions in Luke 24:47-49 and Acts 1:8. The speech anticipates the subsequent narrative by the continuation of themes such as the exaltation of Christ, the gift of the Spirit, and the centrality of salvation in the later chapters. The disclosure of God's purposes from a reliable character can be found in the fact that the speech is said to be Spirit-inspired (*apophthengomai*), which links it to the empowerment of the Spirit to bear true witness (Acts 2:4,14).

<sup>23</sup> Both are placed at the beginning of each narrative, both associate the reception of the Spirit with prayer, both record audible and visible manifestations, and both explain the events as fulfilments of Old Testament prophecies. Robert P. Menzies, 'Luke's Understanding of Baptism in the Holy Spirit A Pentecostal Perspective', *Pentecostal Studies* 6, no. 2 (2007): 116-17.

<sup>24</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and Its Fulfilment in Lukan Christology*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 132.

<sup>25</sup> Graham H. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke's View of the Church* (London: Baker Academic, 2009), 86; Joel B. Green, 'From "John's Baptism" to "Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus": The Significance of Baptism in Luke-Acts', in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R.E.O White* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 161.

in response, and the resulting presentation of the inner life of the community presented here. These texts are the fullest account that Luke gives us of the nature of the church and the fact that there are clear echoes of these passages in later presentations of this community suggests that once again Luke has put representative material early on in his narrative that are then assumed and built upon as the story progresses.

Methodologically, I am interested primarily in examining how the final form of Luke's writings<sup>26</sup> present an answer to the question set before us, and therefore it is narrative, rather than text or form criticism, that takes centre stage.<sup>27</sup> In adopting this approach I am indebted to the likes of Tannehill,<sup>28</sup> Powell,<sup>29</sup> Kurz,<sup>30</sup> and others,<sup>31</sup> who have pioneered a more literary approach to the text that takes both the final text and the theological content seriously.<sup>32</sup> However, I will also draw upon any pertinent relevant historical, linguistic, or cultural information that helps to illuminate our subject matter, for as Schnabel notes, it is impossible to truly understand the meaning of the narrative without recourse to information regarding the wider context in which they were formed and read.<sup>33</sup> By giving a certain priority to an intra-textual reading of Luke-Acts, I hope to demonstrate that there is a certain pattern that emerges with regards to our three themes of 'message', 'response', and 'community'. This pattern can be summarised quite simply by the idea, that according to Luke, a proper response to the preaching of the word of God results in the formation of the true people of God.

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<sup>26</sup> Throughout this paper the traditional understanding of the Gospel and Acts as a unified two-part narrative, and the ascription of authorship to 'Luke', will be assumed. For a recent, nuanced, but robust defence of these positions see Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 550–81.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. Volume 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts. A Literary Interpretation Vol. 2 Vol. 2*, 1994.

<sup>29</sup> Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*

<sup>30</sup> William S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> For introductions to narrative criticism see Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 74–91; Scot McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 127–36; William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert I. Hubbard Jr, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Revised and Updated (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 63–78; Mark Allan Powell, 'Toward a Narrative-Critical Understanding of Luke', *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 48, no. 4 (1 October 1994): 347.

<sup>32</sup> Powell writes 'narrative criticism challenges the dichotomy between literary or aesthetic appreciation and historical or theological understanding'. Mark Allan Powell, 'Toward a Narrative-Critical Understanding of Luke', *Interpretation* 48, no. 4 (October 1994): 341–46.

<sup>33</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, 'Fads and Common Sense: Reading Acts in the First Century and Reading Acts Today', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 2 (June 2011): 276–78.

Last but not least, all biblical references will be taken from the NRSV unless stated otherwise.

# Chapter One: John the Baptist

## Introduction

This chapter, in which we will be looking at John the Baptist, will be broken down under the three main headings of 'Message', 'Response' and 'Community'. In the section regarding John's message we will explore his vocation as a prophet to Israel who spoke of God's imminent coming in both salvation and judgement. Following on from this it will be demonstrated that this message demanded a radical response from the listeners, which is best formulated in John's call to a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Luke 3:3). Here and throughout his Gospel, Luke refuses to allow this 'response' to remain abstract for he has a particular concern that repentance toward God be embodied, and given integrity, by way of concrete acts of justice, mercy and generosity toward others. Finally, in the section on community, we will investigate how John's preaching caused a division within the people of God that resulted in a community consisting of unlikely participants who had accepted and received the word of God and pledged themselves to God afresh.

## Message

### Prophet to Israel

When exploring John's message, it is important to note that in the opening verses of chapter three of Luke's Gospel, we are presented with a picture of John as a prophet, something that had been alluded to implicitly in 1:13-17 and stated unequivocally in 1:76.<sup>34</sup> In 1:16-17 the angel Gabriel had told Zechariah that John would minister in the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah, and in 1:76 John is explicitly to be called 'prophet of the Most High' (cf. 7:24-28). In Luke chapter three however, this prophetic vocation is clearly alluded to by means of Luke's dating of John the Baptist's ministry, the portrayal of John as one to whom the 'word of God' came, and in the description of him as 'John son of Zechariah'; all of which are associated with prophetic figures in the Old Testament.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> 1:16-17 relates John's ministry to that of Elijah and his call to repentance and 1:76 calls John 'the prophet of the Most High'. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1997), 163.

<sup>35</sup> Dating (Isa. 1:1; Jer. 1:1; Dan. 1:1; Ezek. 1:13; Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1), Word of God (Gen. 15:1; 1 Sam. 15:10; 1 Kgs. 6:11; 2 Sam. 7:4; 2 Kgs. 20:4; 1 Chr. 17:3; Isa. 1:1; Jer. 1:2), 'Son of' (1 Kgs. 19:19; 2 Kgs. 3:11; 2 Chr. 18:7; Isa. 1:1; Jer. 1:1; Ezek. 1:3; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Zech. 1:1). See Clint Burnett, 'Eschatological Prophet of Restoration: Luke's Theological Portrait of John the Baptist in Luke 3:1-6', *Neotestamentica* 47, no. 1 (2013): 3-8.



After the word of God is said to have come to John in the wilderness, he is then described as going ‘into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ (3:3). What is important to note here is the emphasis that Luke places on the comprehensive nature of John’s message, for Luke describes ‘all the people’ (*hapanta ton laon*) as being baptised by John (3:21, 7:29), and in Paul’s speech in Acts 13 he speaks of John proclaiming his message to ‘all the people of Israel’ (13:24).<sup>36</sup> This all-encompassing perspective is an important one for Luke<sup>37</sup> and helps to emphasise the idea that YHWH’s message was not aimed at a select few but were focused toward, and trained on the hearts of all the people of Israel.<sup>38</sup>

#### Isaiah 40

The message that John is said to have proclaimed all around the region of the Jordan is summarised by Luke’s phrase ‘a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ (3:3). We will examine these elements in more detail in the section below in the section on ‘Response’, which explores the implications that John’s message demanded from its listeners. Here we will initially focus on the scripture that Luke suggests interprets John’s ministry and message, namely Isaiah 40:3-5. By using Isaiah 40 to interpret John’s message and ministry, Luke now intentionally locates him within the salvation-historical purposes of YHWH, and more specifically with the promised restoration of Israel following her exile.<sup>39</sup>

The opening clause of the citation from Isaiah 40 describes ‘the voice of one crying out in the wilderness’, and follows the Greek text of the Septuagint by using the wilderness

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<sup>36</sup> Michael E Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel Israel’s Re-Gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke-Acts* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 223–24.

<sup>37</sup> The phrase “all the people” occurs ten times in Luke-Acts (Luke 2:10; 3:21; 8:47; 9:13; 20:45; 24:19; cf. 2:31 “all the peoples”; Acts 4:10; 5:34; 10:41; 13:24). Perhaps, more significantly is the fact that the phrase does not appear at all in the other Gospels. Luke alone portrays the period of the Baptist in such comprehensive terms’. Fuller, 223–24 n. 112.

<sup>38</sup> This unique focus on the call to repentance being for all the people undermines Taylor’s assertion that such a summons was only for the ‘wicked’ and that not all people were expected to be baptised by John. Joan E Taylor, *John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1997), 148–49. It is also at odds with Hollenbach’s assertion that John only preached to the powerful elites and was not aimed toward Israel as a whole. See Paul Hollenbach, ‘Social Aspects of John the Baptizer’s Preaching Mission in the Context of Palestinian Judaism’, in *Principat 19/1; Judentum: Allgemeines; Palaestinisches Judentum* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 857–58.

<sup>39</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 171. The importance of Isaiah 40:3 for understanding the Baptist is evident in its presence in all four of the Gospels but it is Luke alone, for reasons considered later, who extends the quotation to include Isaiah 40:4-5. In the Synoptic Gospels this quotation is used by the evangelists to identify the Baptist whereas in John 1:23 it is a self-designation on the lips of John the Baptist. Klyne Snodgrass, “Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40:1-5 and Their Adaptation in the New Testament,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 8 (July 1980): 33.

imagery to locate the *place of the voice* (one crying out in the wilderness), rather than the *place of preparation* (one crying out; In the wilderness) as found in the Masoretic Text, Dead Sea Scrolls and Targumim of Isaiah.<sup>40</sup> The previous descriptions of John as being 'in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel' (1:80), as one to whom the word of God came in the wilderness (3:2), and who is now described as declaring his message in wilderness regions (3:3) all suggest to the reader that they should associate John's message with that proclaimed by the voice in Isaiah 40:3-5. Thus, John is to be understood as the voice that is proclaiming 'prepare the way of the Lord!' This emphasis on John's preparatory vocation should not surprise the reader for it has already been highlighted several times in the infancy narratives and we will briefly explore this aspect of his role before returning to the Isaiah 40 quotation.

In 1:17 John is said to be called to 'make ready (*hetoimasai*) a people prepared (*kateskeuasmēnōn*) for the Lord', and in 1:76 he is summoned to go 'before the Lord to prepare (*hetoimasai*) his ways'. The language of 1:17 echoes that of Malachi 4:5-6 where YHWH promises to send Israel 'the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes' so that he might 'turn the hearts of fathers to their sons and the hearts of sons to their fathers, so that [He] will not come and strike the land with a curse'. The precise identities of the fathers and sons in this verse are unclear<sup>41</sup> but the undoubted focus on reconciliation in the passage is developed and emphasised as it is interpreted by later authors. Both the Septuagint and Ben Sirach, when using this verse, retain the mention of the fathers turning to the sons but change the second half of the clause, regarding the turning of the sons to the fathers, to accentuate different points; the Septuagint moves the focus of repentance and reconciliation beyond that of the

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<sup>40</sup> Burnett, 'Eschatological Prophet of Restoration', 15.

<sup>41</sup> Immediate family relations have been suggested, as per Micah 7:6; Joel 3:1; Amos 2:7 and Zech. 13:3, but this is unlikely due to the lack of any other such uses in Malachi. Israel's relation to YHWH as Father is also an option (3:17) but the fact that Malachi 4:6 speaks of fathers (plural) rather than a father (singular), suggests that this is not what the author intended. The last, and probably best option is that of the current generations relationship to their ancestors (3:6-7, cf. Zech. 1:2-6) and in light of the adjacent emphasis on Torah obedience in 4:4 and earlier condemnation of the descendants for precisely such transgressions, this appears to be the best way of understanding the text. However, this remains ambiguous and there may be 'layer[s] of interpretation' present. See Caryn A Reeder, 'Malachi 3:24 and the Eschatological Restoration of the "Family"', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (October 2007): 695-709; Elie Assis, 'Moses, Elijah and the Messianic Hope: A New Reading of Malachi 3:22-24', *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 123, no. 2 (2011): 207-20. For a list of possible options see James D Nogalski, *Micah - Malachi: The Book of the Twelve* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2011), 1069-70; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 89-90; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 60; Reeder, 'Malachi 3'.

immediate family and into wider social circles by replacing the phrase with ‘and the heart of a man to his neighbour’,<sup>42</sup> whilst Ben Sirach focuses on the eschatological restoration of Israel by replacing the same phrase with ‘to restore the tribes of Israel’.<sup>43</sup> The angel Gabriel himself continues this interpretive tradition by changing the second-half of the clause to read ‘and the disobedient to the righteous’.

Whilst it is not clear exactly who Luke is referring to with this mention of fathers and sons<sup>44</sup> or the disobedient and the righteous,<sup>45</sup> or how these clauses might relate to each other,<sup>46</sup> it seems apparent that Luke’s focus is ‘not reconciliation of families but amendment of life in a general sense’.<sup>47</sup> For where the Septuagint focuses on social relationships and Sirach on the restoration of Israel, Gabriel has chosen to highlight the ethical implications of the turning of the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, something that complements John the Baptist’s later ethical instruction regarding repentance (3:7-14).

And in words that are described as ‘virtually a summary of key themes’<sup>48</sup> of John’s later ministry, Luke 1:76 articulates his role using terms such as ‘prophet’ (*prophētēs*), ‘preparing the way’ (*hetoimazō autos hodos*), ‘salvation’ (*sōtēria*) and ‘forgiveness of sins’ (*aphesis autos harmartia*), all of which are present in the opening verses of Luke chapter three.<sup>49</sup> In 1:76b John’s prophetic role is said to include, indeed be grounded

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Bauckham, ‘The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts’, in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. James M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 441.

<sup>43</sup> Bauckham, 440–41.

<sup>44</sup> Most scholars understand it in terms of kinship, see Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 59–60; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: 1-9*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 320; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 77; John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 31; Bock, *Luke 1*, 89–90. Other options include seeing a hint toward the acceptance of Gentiles by Israel (Fitzmyer) but this seems unlikely due to John’s focus and preparation of Israel, or perhaps it might infer the need for the older generation (fathers) to repent in light of the new thing that God is doing, which the younger generation (children) embrace more readily (Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Luke* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984) 22-23, but there is little evidence that one generation were more open to John’s message than another. See Bock, *Luke 1*, 89–90.

<sup>45</sup> It could reflect Daniel 12:3 where the wise are said to lead many to righteousness, but it more likely reflects the description of Levi in Malachi 2:6 who was said to have given ‘true instruction’ and ‘turned many from iniquity’. Matthias Wenk suggests that the father-son relationship should be understood ‘paradigmatically for interpersonal relationships’ and the crowds, tax collectors and soldiers as exemplars of the disobedient who turn to the wisdom of the righteous and therefore 3:10-14 is seen to be a fulfilment of 1:16-17. Matthias Wenk, *Community-Forming Power: The Socio-Ethical Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 177–78.

<sup>46</sup> Should this be understood as a parallelism that equates the fathers with the righteous and the children with the disobedient or vice-versa? Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 60.

<sup>47</sup> Bauckham, ‘The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts’, 2001, 447.

<sup>48</sup> Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Tannehill, 24.

by,<sup>50</sup> his going ‘before the Lord to prepare his ways’. The language of John going before the Lord evokes texts such as Malachi 3:1, 4:5, and Isaiah 40:3, all of which are alluded to in these opening chapters (1:16,76, 3:4). Central to John’s role of preparation is his giving the people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins,<sup>51</sup> which, whilst discussed in more detail below, should be noted for presenting the two ideas of salvation and forgiveness as intrinsically linked right from the start. Thus, in multiple ways, John’s preparatory vocation is emphasised, predicted and ultimately fulfilled in these early chapters.

Returning now to Isaiah 40:3-5, we discover that after proclaiming the need for the way of the Lord to be prepared, the voice that is crying out in the wilderness begins to describe in detail what that preparation looks like by way of the transformation of topographical imagery. Thus paths will be made straight, valleys will be filled, mountains and hills made low, crooked paths straight and rough ways smooth before the climactic moment when all flesh will see the salvation of God (Luke 3:4-6; Isaiah 40:3-5). Tannehill notes that Luke sandwiches his quotation of Isaiah 40:3-5 by calls to repentance and suggests therefore that the images found therein function metaphorically as symbolic representations of what repentance might look like.<sup>52</sup> Thus the raised valleys anticipate the lifting of the lowly, the mountains and hills being brought low anticipate the humbling of the proud and the powerful (Luke 1:52),<sup>53</sup> whilst the straightening of crooked paths are suggestive of those called to repent of their crooked ways and embrace the straight paths of the Lord (Acts 2:40, 8:21, 13:10. Cf. Phil 2:15).<sup>54</sup>

The purpose and *telos* of this landscape-altering preparation is ultimately the unveiling of the salvation of the Lord to all flesh. The climax of Luke’s quotation of Isaiah 40:5 at the point of universal salvation only serves to underscore the importance and centrality of salvation found throughout Luke-Acts. This again, should come as no surprise to the reader for already, in the infancy narratives, which ‘lay the theological foundation for

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<sup>50</sup> Notice the presence of the linking ‘for’ (*gar*) between the two clauses of 1:76.

<sup>51</sup> The idea of giving ‘knowledge of salvation’ is said to be a Hebrew idiom that is equivalent to the ‘experience of salvation’ Nolland, *Luke. 1-9*, 89.

<sup>52</sup> Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 48.

<sup>53</sup> See Luke 10:15, 14:11, 18:14.

<sup>54</sup> Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 48. See also Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 137.; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 171-172.

the lengthy narrative to follow',<sup>55</sup> one finds a 'high concentration of salvation terms'<sup>56</sup> such as 'salvation' (*soteria*), 'favour' (*epiblepō*), 'mercy' (*eleos*), 'redemption' (*lytrōsis*), 'rescue' (*rhyomai*), 'consolation' (*paraklesis*), 'light' (*epiphainō, phōs*) and 'peace' (*eirēnē*).<sup>57</sup> The use of 'salvation' vocabulary is not limited to the infancy narratives however and can consistently be found throughout the Gospel<sup>58</sup> with an incredibly broad and diverse application.<sup>59</sup> That it will be 'all flesh' (*pasa sarx*) that sees the salvation of God here is also significant for God's universal intentions have already been hinted at earlier in the narrative when in Luke 2:30 the aged prophet Simeon speaks of Jesus as the agent of salvation who will be a 'light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel'. It is surely no coincidence that later in the narrative the same phrase 'all flesh' (*pasan sarka*) will once again hint toward the spread of the word of God and salvation to the ends of the earth (Acts 2:17).<sup>60</sup>

This soaring crescendo of salvation is rudely interrupted however and brought back down to earth with a crash as those who had made the journey out into the wilderness to see John are confronted with stinging prophetic criticism that labelled them 'offspring' (*gennāma*) of vipers and threatened them with fast-approaching wrath (Luke 3:7). Whilst the stark juxtaposition between salvation and judgment appears contradictory, they are, in Luke's mind, inherently and inseparably related to one another. For immediately following the quotation of Isaiah 40:3-5, and just before John launches into warnings of coming wrath, Luke uses the Greek conjunction '*oun*', which translates as 'therefore', and thus demonstrates a causal relationship between the coming of the Lord in both salvation and judgement.<sup>61</sup> According to Luke then, it was

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<sup>55</sup> Joel B. Green, "'The Message of Salvation' in Luke-Acts", *Ex Auditu* 5 (1989): 22.; Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 47.; Klyne Snodgrass, 'Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40:1-5 and Their Adaptation in the New Testament', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 8 (July 1980): 36-41.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts* (A&C Black, 2008), 64.

<sup>57</sup> Mallen, 64.

<sup>58</sup> See Luke 1:47,69,71,77; 2:11,30; 3:6; 6:9; 7:3,50; 8:12,36,48,50; 9:24; 13:23; 15:13; 17:19; 18:26,42; 19:9,10; 23:35,37,39.

<sup>59</sup> See the charts in Mark Allan Powell, 'Salvation in Luke-Acts', *Word & World* 12, no. 1 (1992): 5-10; Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 239-277.

<sup>60</sup> There are only three occasions in Luke-Acts where the neuter form of 'salvation' (*sōtērion*) is used, with each use describing a worldwide emphasis. The first use, as mentioned, is in Luke 2:30 where Simeon speaks of Jesus as the agent of salvation who will be a 'light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel'. The second is the use of Isaiah 40:3-5 to interpret John's ministry, and the third is by Paul in Acts 28:28 as he is also describing the message of salvation being taken to the Gentiles. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 40-41.

<sup>61</sup> The '*oun*' is curiously missing from the NRSV and TNIV.

precisely *because* YHWH was about to visit his people with salvation that they were warned about making sure that they were in right standing before him.<sup>62</sup>

Following his warning of impending wrath, John exhorts the people to ‘bear fruits worthy of repentance’ and to not ‘begin to say to [themselves], “we have Abraham as our ancestor”’, because ‘God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham’ (Luke 3:8-9). John’s earlier designation of the crowds<sup>63</sup> as ‘sons of snakes’<sup>64</sup> stands now in direct contrast to the subsequent discussion regarding their status as ‘children of Abraham’ (3:8) and highlights their true condition and therefore their need of repentance.<sup>65</sup> For just as snakes flee before fire so John accuses the crowd of being serpents who are likewise fleeing the burning wrath to be revealed on the Day of the Lord.<sup>66</sup> We know already, from what Luke has told us, that the coming salvation is in direct fulfilment of the promises that YHWH had made to the ancestors, particularly to Abraham<sup>67</sup> and his *descendants* forever (Luke 1:54-55, 72-73), but we are now informed that that not all who claim Abraham as their ancestor will experience such salvation.<sup>68</sup> Tragically, there will be those from Abraham’s family who will find themselves outside of the people of God. This is remarkable, for as Dale Allison points out, ‘one could scarcely hope to find a more straightforward rejection of the notion that to be born a Jew is to be born into the covenant community’.<sup>69</sup>

As if this was not enough to shake the people out of their complacency, John declares that they have no time to lose and must choose their path quickly for ‘even now the axe is lying at the foot of the tree’ (3:9)! John builds on and develops his earlier exhortation to ‘bear fruits (*karpos*) worthy of repentance’ (3:8) and cautions the people that every tree that fails to bear good fruit (*karpos*) will be cut down and thrown into the fire (3:9).

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<sup>62</sup> The association of John with the messenger and Elijah figure and of Mal 3:1, 4:5-6 highlights the judgement theme as they were both associated with coming judgement (Mal 3:2-3, 4:5-6. Cf. Sir 48:10b). Joseph M. Lear JR, ‘What Shall We Do? Eschatology and Ethics in Luke-Acts’ (Aberdeen, 2015), 66.

<sup>63</sup> Luke aims this critique at the general crowds whilst in Matthew it is more specifically the Pharisees and Sadducees that feel the brunt of John’s words.

<sup>64</sup> Bock, *Luke 1*, 303.

<sup>65</sup> Marshall writes ‘The offspring share the character of the parents’ and so is ‘akin to “children of Satan” (John 8:44). Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 139.

<sup>66</sup> “Wrath to come” is “a cipher for judgment on the day of the Lord”. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 175; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 464; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 139.

<sup>67</sup> Luke 1:54-55, 72-73

<sup>68</sup> Lear JR, ‘What Shall We Do? Eschatology and Ethics in Luke-Acts’, 66.

<sup>69</sup> Dale C. Allison Jr, ‘Jesus and the Covenant: A Response to E P Sanders’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (February 1987): 59.

These words would surely have haunted John's listeners for they were intimately acquainted from their Scriptures with imagery concerning the fires of judgment,<sup>70</sup> and even the felling of trees<sup>71</sup> and vines, precisely for their lack of acceptable fruit.<sup>72</sup> All is not lost though, for Bock points out, it is only the 'unfruitful and the unrepentant [that] need to be concerned about the ax's [sic] falling'<sup>73</sup> as it will only be these that will be destroyed (13:1-9).

### Summary

So, in summary, Luke has shown John to be a prophet to Israel and who, precisely as a prophet, called God's people back to covenant faithfulness by their submission to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Luke further identifies and interprets John through the text of Isaiah 40:3-5 which highlights John's preparatory role and his message of God's imminent arrival in both salvation and judgement in accordance with his promised programme of corporate restoration. The use of the imagery from Isaiah 40 additionally serves to demonstrate that this coming of God would challenge and subvert the status quo as mountains are levelled, valleys raised up, crooked paths made straight, and rough ways made smooth, and God's salvation is made known to all flesh.

### Response

In this second section where we will investigate what kind of response John's message demanded from its listeners it will be important to bear in mind that it is within this context of impending salvation and judgement that John came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. We will examine each element of John's call in turn, beginning with baptism, followed by repentance, and forgiveness of sins, before concluding with what John might have meant by speaking of 'fruits worthy of repentance'.

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<sup>70</sup> For fire as a symbol of Judgement in the Old Testament and Intertestamental literature see Isa 29:6; 31:9; Ezek 38:22; Amos 7:4; Zeph 1:18; 3:8; Mal 3:2; 4:1; Pss. Sol. 15:6f.; 1 En. 90:24-27; IQS 2:8; 4:13; 1QpHab. 2:11-13. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 146-48.

<sup>71</sup> See Dan 4:1-27; Isa 10:33-34; Ezek 31:1-18. Charles Hugh Hope Scobie, *John the Baptist* (London: SCM Pr., 1964), 60-61.

<sup>72</sup> Israel herself is often depicted as a vine that suffers under the judgement of YHWH for not producing the expected fruit. See Isa 2:21-22, 5:1-7; Ezek 19:10-14. Cf. Jub. 36:6-7; Pss. Sol. 14:3-4.

<sup>73</sup> Bock, *Luke 1*, 307.

## Baptism

We begin by exploring baptism and whilst Luke does not spend much time on John's actual act of baptising it will be important to give a brief overview of what it could have and might have meant to those coming out to be baptised by John. There are three main options regarding the primary influence upon John's baptism: the ritual purity ablutions of the Old Testament, Proselyte baptisms, and the ritual ablutions of the Qumran community, and each will be briefly examined in turn.

At the heart of the nature of ablutions in the Old Testament lies the concept of cleanliness or uncleanness, a concern found primarily in the ritual purity laws of Leviticus. There are a number of circumstances by which someone might be considered unclean,<sup>74</sup> but it is important here to make a distinction between something regarded as unclean and something being regarded as sinful, for whilst sin does make one unclean, not everything that is unclean is considered sinful.<sup>75</sup> Thus those who may not be considered sinful but who remain in a state of ritual uncleanness, still need to be cleansed by means of ceremonial washing for in this state they remain exposed to the dangerous holiness of God and therefore potentially exposed to judgement.<sup>76</sup>

The remedy for such uncleanness is found in the prescribed rituals that allow a person<sup>77</sup> to return to a condition of cleanness. The remedies given depend on the person<sup>78</sup> and the severity of defilement,<sup>79</sup> but the primary purpose of such prescriptions should be understood in terms of cleansing that which is unclean.<sup>80</sup> Traditionally it appears that physical contagion was to be dealt with through washings, whilst moral impurity was

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<sup>74</sup> Such as skin disease (Lev 13-14), a discharge of a bodily fluid (Lev 12:1-8, 15:2-3, 16, 19-30), contact with unclean things (Lev 5:1-3, 7:19, 21, 11:24-28, 33-34, 44, 15:4-11, 19-24), unclean animals and food (Lev 5:1-3, 7:19, 21, 11:10, 11, 12, 13, 20, 23, 41), or immoral acts (Lev 18). See Joe M. Sprinkle, 'The Rationale of the Laws of Clean and Unclean in the Old Testament', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 4 (December 2000): 641.

<sup>75</sup> John C. Collins, 'What Does Baptism Do for Anyone? Part I Exegetical Background', *Presbyterion* 38, no. 1 (2012): 4.

<sup>76</sup> The laws of clean and unclean found in Leviticus 11-15 are bracketed by the death of Aaron's sons for improperly approaching the sanctuary (Lev 10) and the Day of Atonement regulations that use their death as a warning (Lev 16). Sprinkle, 'The Rationale of the Laws of Clean and Unclean in the Old Testament', 641.

<sup>77</sup> There are cleansing rituals for objects also such as sprinkling (Num 19:18) or washing (Lev 15:4-12, 20-27) with water. Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptiser and Prophet: A Socio-Historical History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 97-98.

<sup>78</sup> Priests have a different set of regulations to the layperson in Israel according to their role in the cult. See Sprinkle, 'The Rationale of the Laws of Clean and Unclean in the Old Testament', 642.

<sup>79</sup> For a report of the differing remedies for differing levels of uncleanness see Sprinkle, 641-45.

<sup>80</sup> Webb, *John the Baptiser and Prophet*, 106.



usually cleansed through sacrifice, but there also appears to be a further 'metaphorical use' of ablution language that somewhat combines the two.<sup>81</sup>

The concept that sin renders one unclean before God seems to have contributed to the development of metaphorical language to describe the washing and removal of sin,<sup>82</sup> but particularly pertinent are those texts that speak of a future eschatological removal of sin by God alone (i.e. Isaiah 4:4; Ezekiel 36:25).<sup>83</sup> It is in light of such a development that Beasley-Murray states that in the prophetic tradition the ablutions of the cult have become 'spiritualised' and thus there appears to be an eschatological and definitive washing for the removal of the sin.<sup>84</sup> This prophetic picture of an eschatological cleansing from sin for the people of God would then appear to sit well with both John's prophetic role and his message concerning a baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

With regards to proselyte baptism, there might appear to be some initial similarities with John's baptism, such as their one-off nature, the administration by others, and their sense of inner transformation, and community initiation,<sup>85</sup> but the crucial problem lies in dating the practice. Jeremias, who is said to have made the strongest case for an early dating and therefore as a possible influence on John, suggests that the debate regarding whether or not Gentiles were considered ritually impure and therefore in need of baptism, had been settled 'with certainty ... back to pre-Christian times'<sup>86</sup> and therefore 'the necessity of a bath of purification on conversion was admitted'.<sup>87</sup> In support of this claim he cites texts such as the *Testament of Levi*, the *Sibylline Oracles* and Epictetus.<sup>88</sup> He also adds the aforementioned similarities between Christian and Proselyte baptism,<sup>89</sup> and the impossibility that Judaism may have been influenced by Christian baptismal practices, as further evidence.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Webb, 104–5.

<sup>82</sup> Either by one's own hands (Pss 26:6, 73:13; Prov 30:12; Isa 1:16–17; Jer 4:14), or by an act of God (Pss 51:2,7; Ezek 16:4,9).

<sup>83</sup> Webb, *John the Baptiser and Prophet*, 104–5.

<sup>84</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 9.

<sup>85</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Origins of Christian Baptism', in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995), 41.

<sup>86</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 26.

<sup>87</sup> Jeremias cites the story of the High Priest Simeon who was contaminated by an Arab's spittle, who in turn was made unclean by his wife's menstruations, which can be dated to A.D 17–18. The story is told for example in t.Yoma 4:20 (189); b.Yoma 47a; j.Yoma I.38d. 6; j.Meg. I.72a; j.Hor. 3.47d. II. Jeremias, 25 n.9.

<sup>88</sup> *T. Levi* 14.6; *Sib. Or.* 4.162–70; Epictetus *Diatr.* 2.9.19–21.

<sup>89</sup> Such as those found in the terminology, administration, instructions and theology between the two.

<sup>90</sup> Jeremias, *Infant Baptism*, 24–37.

However, Webb has investigated these claims and finds them 'less than convincing'<sup>91</sup> for the following reasons. Firstly, whilst he recognises that there are early texts that suggest that Gentiles were considered unclean,<sup>92</sup> he argues that this was far from a universally accepted position<sup>93</sup> and that Jeremias has misunderstood one of the key texts with regard to this argument.<sup>94</sup> Secondly, Webb argues that some of the other texts that Jeremias appeals to such as the *Testament of Levi* are also not as clear in their meaning as he suggests.<sup>95</sup> Thirdly, the initial similarities between Christian baptism for initiation and proselyte baptism become significantly weakened in light of these criticisms and as Ferguson points out 'the argument is specious ... for Jews had other precedents than Christianity for adopting a bath for proselytes, not least their purificatory practices, from which the immersion of proselytes probably derived, whenever its origin'.<sup>96</sup> All of this, combined with the fact that there is no mention of the practice of proselyte baptism in Josephus or Philo suggests that the dating, and therefore the influence, of Proselyte baptism are unclear, and cannot be confidently asserted as the background to John's baptism.

Another possible background can be found in the ritual immersions of the Qumran community. On an immediate reading, as with proselyte baptism, there appear to be strong points of contact between the two: these include their being performed in the wilderness, their link to an ascetic lifestyle, the total immersion in water, the need for corresponding ethical commitment, and their eschatological context.<sup>97</sup> However, on closer inspection these fail to impress. A major reason for this is that the ablutions in the Qumran community appear to be 'an intensification of the practices current in Judaism'<sup>98</sup> and therefore subject to the same criticisms as those regarding the cleansings of the Old Testament as mentioned above. These criticisms include the fact that John's baptism was initiated and administered by John as a one-off event whilst those in

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<sup>91</sup> Webb, *John the Baptiser and Prophet*, 123ff.

<sup>92</sup> See Jos. *J.W* 2.150; *t.Yoma* 4.20; John 18:28; Acts 10:28. Webb, 124 n.103.

<sup>93</sup> See b. Pesah. 92a which states concerning a proselyte that 'the previous year he was a heathen and not susceptible to uncleanness, whereas now he is an Israelite and susceptible to uncleanness'. Webb, 123–27.

<sup>94</sup> Webb argues that *m. 'Ed.* 5.1 (= *m.Nid.* 4.3) means that menstrual blood, like urine and spittle, is only considered unclean when moist and not dry. Thus a Gentile woman would not be in a continual state of uncleanness. Webb, 124–25.

<sup>95</sup> Webb, 125 and see n.109; Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 23.

<sup>96</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 79.

<sup>97</sup> Collins, 'The Origins of Christian Baptism', 41; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 68–71.

<sup>98</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 68.

Qumran were communal, self-enacted and daily.<sup>99</sup> But again, John's baptism appears to be a prophetic and eschatological development of the fundamental ideas regarding the cleansing properties of baptism that are found in the Old Testament and Qumran, and therefore they function as part of the wider background without being a strict parallel.

It appears then that there are both similarities and differences between John's baptism and other potential precedents. The consistent association of washing with the removal of uncleanness in Judaism, alongside John's baptismal emphasis on forgiveness of sins, suggests that John stood in line with the prophetic trajectory and tradition in which cultic ideas had become 'spiritualised' and cleansing from impurity associated with removal of sin (Ezek. 36:25; Isa. 4:4). According to John, 'the people of Israel were unclean and unfit to meet the Messiah and therefore had to be cleansed',<sup>100</sup> and baptism was the means of such cleansing. This 'prophetic adaptation' would sit well with John's priestly heritage and prophetic vocation and there seems no reason to deny John this freedom and creativity. Thus, Ferguson, after reviewing John's baptism in relation to other Jewish immersions writes 'in short, it may be that baptism as an act of prophetic symbolism set John's practice apart from other Jewish washings'.<sup>101</sup>

## Repentance

John's baptism is described explicitly as a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and we now turn our attention to the theme of repentance and its importance for understanding not only John but also Luke's wider narrative. The significance of repentance for Luke can be readily seen by the fact that forty-five percent of all uses in the New Testament occur within its pages,<sup>102</sup> and Morlan is worth quoting at length here to emphasise this point:

Luke bookends his two-volume narrative with John the Baptist and the apostle Paul urging their auditors to perform actions worthy of repentance (Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20) and he gives his readers a hint as to what sort of actions count as being 'worthy of repentance' (Luke 3:10-14). It is only in Luke do we discover explicitly

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<sup>99</sup> Collins, 'The Origins of Christian Baptism', 41.

<sup>100</sup> Gerald R. Procee, 'Christian Baptism and the Baptism of John: A Comparative Study', *Puritan Reformed Journal* 4, no. 2 (July 2012): 35.

<sup>101</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 85.

<sup>102</sup> Guy D. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 3.

that Jesus' mission was not just calling sinners (Matt. 9:13 and Mark 2:17) but calling sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). Only Luke includes Jesus' parable of the repentant son (Luke 15:11-32) as well as his teaching on cosmic celebration when just one sinner repents (Luke 15:10, 22-23). In Luke Jesus forgives a repentant criminal even in the 'eleventh' hour of his execution and welcomes him into paradise (Luke 23:39-43). In Luke's Great Commission, 'repentance for the forgiveness of sin' is the central message of the Risen Christ (Luke 24:44) and in volume two this commission is followed both forcefully and fearlessly in the preaching of Peter (Acts 2:38; 3:19), Peter and the Apostles (5:29, 31), and Paul (17:30; 20:21; 26:20). Thus, the proclamation of repentance and proper response to repentance is not only pervasive in this narrative, but comprehension of it is pivotal to Luke's overarching notion of conversion.<sup>103</sup>

That repentance is important for Luke is clear, but what needs to be established is exactly what the term 'repentance' might mean within Luke's conceptual world. The natural starting point for this is the Old Testament and more specifically the Hebrew word *sub*, which is the predominant term used there to describe repentance. This term has a wide range of meaning that orbits around the central sense of turning or returning.<sup>104</sup> It can be used to describe a literal and physical turning, but it can also be used in a metaphorical and religious sense whereby people are said to turn away from,<sup>105</sup> or back to<sup>106</sup> God. Holladay analysed every occurrence of the term in the Old Testament,<sup>107</sup> and whilst in agreement with the term's fundamental meaning of 'turning'

<sup>103</sup> David S. Morlan, 'Hebraic Notions of Repentance in Luke-Acts', *Paper Presented at the British New Testament Society Conference in Manchester 2014*, n.d., 1.

<sup>104</sup> The 'DBL Hebrew' lists fifteen possible semantic domains for *sub* but suggests that they are all organised around the core concept of turning. See Thompson and Martens, DBL Hebrew, 8740.

<sup>105</sup> J.A. Thompson and Elmer A. Martens, '8740 שׁוּב', in *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis Volume 4*, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 56. Examples of this metaphorical and religious turning away from YHWH include those specifically associated with idolatry (e.g. Judg 2:19; 8:33; 1 Kgs 9:6; Isa 57:17; Jer 11:10; Hos 11:7) or more general sin (e.g. Num 14:43; Josh 22:16, 18, 23, 29; 1 Sam 15:11; Jer 34:16; Ezek 3:20; 18:24, 26).

<sup>106</sup> Examples of turning back to YHWH and away from idolatry include Deut 4:28-30; 1 Sam 7:3; 1 Kgs 13:33; 2 Kgs 17:13; 23:25; 2 Chr 7:14, 19; 15:4; 30:6, 9; 36:13; Isa 31:6; Jer 3:1, 7, 10, 12, 14, 19, 22; 4:1; 8:4, 5; 18:8, 11; 25:5; 26:3; 35:15; 36:3, 7; 44:5; Ezek 14:6; and Hos 3:5; 5:4; 6:1; 11:5; 14:1, 2, 4. Examples of turning to YHWH and away from general sins include Deut 30:2, 10; 1 Kgs 8:33, 35, 47, 48; 2 Chr 6:24, 26, 37, 38; Neh 1:9; 9:26, 29, 35; Job 22:23; 36:10; Ps 7:12; 51:13; Jer 5:3; 15:7; 23:14; 34:16; Dan 9:13; Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11.

<sup>107</sup> For a list of the data see William Lee Holladay, *The Root Šûb in the Old Testament with Particular Reference to Its Usages in Covenantal Contexts* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958), 7.

or 'returning', he also identified a key element of use that referred directly to Israel's covenant with YHWH.<sup>108</sup>

This covenantal aspect of the term is important to bear in mind for it is the breaking of this unique and all-encompassing covenant relationship that functions as the grounds of the call to repentance. The choice to turn away from God and toward sin is unfortunately not rare in the history of Israel and there are repeated calls, especially from the prophets, for her to repent and return back to God by way of loving obedience to the covenant. Therefore, with John described as a prophet, as the one crying out in the wilderness for the people to repent, he is placed squarely within Israel's prophetic tradition that urged the people to return to covenantal faithfulness to God.<sup>109</sup> Green sums it up when he writes:

through submitting to repentance-baptism, in which their roles were passive, [the people] signified their surrender to God's aim, distanced themselves from past ways of life oriented away from God's purpose, and professed their (re)new(ed) allegiance to his will. By coming out into the wilderness to meet John they symbolised their separation from ordinary life, through baptism they embraced a conversion of loyalties and were themselves embraced into the community of God's people.<sup>110</sup>

### Forgiveness of Sins

Like repentance, forgiveness is an important motif for Luke and whilst the actual term 'forgiveness of sins' is not used often, its presence at key points in the narrative of Luke-Acts suggests that its importance belies its sparse usage.<sup>111</sup> The phrase brackets Luke's Gospel for in the early chapters John the Baptist gives the people knowledge of salvation through his preaching of the forgiveness of sins (1:77, 3:3), whilst in the closing chapter the risen Jesus now commissions his disciples to preach a message of 'repentance for

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<sup>108</sup> Holladay, 117–18. What is remarkable though, is that of these 164 covenantal uses of *sub*, Israel is the subject 123 times and God only 6 times.

<sup>109</sup> Robert Webb suggests that John's baptism is a 'baptism which expresses repentance' due to the fact that repentance is usually understood as the human response to divine initiative rather than as a gift from God, that it is associated with other related human responses in 3:7–14, and because of the link with the confession of sin in Mark 1:5. Webb, *John the Baptiser and Prophet*, 186–87. Julius R. Mantey, 'The Causal Use of *Eis* in the New Testament', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 70, no. 1 (March 1951): 48.

<sup>110</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 164.

<sup>111</sup> For the following observations see Tim Carter, *The Forgiveness of Sins* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2016), 3, 320–22.

the forgiveness of sins' in his name (24:47). This theme continues in Acts as the two main missionary voices, Peter and Paul, are seen to be faithful to the commission and declare a message of the 'forgiveness of sins' to crowds (2:38), leaders in Jerusalem (5:31), to Gentiles (10:43), to Jews of the Diaspora (13:38), and to all who might have heard them preach (26:18). Thus, throughout Luke-Acts there is a clear and consistent aspect of the message proclaimed that emphasised God's offer of forgiveness.

Wright, probably more than anyone else, has consistently and forcefully contended for the idea that Israel in the first century understood herself as still in exile and that 'forgiveness of sins is another way of saying "return from exile"'.<sup>112</sup> For if it is Israel's sin, argues Wright, that has led to her captivity in Babylon,<sup>113</sup> then it will be the forgiveness of these sins that will lead to her return from exile and her eventual restoration.<sup>114</sup>

Therefore, according to Wright, when John the Baptist appears on the scene proclaiming a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' this can be nothing other than the imminent arrival of 'the redemption for which Israel was longing'.<sup>115</sup> Joel Green agrees and argues that this broader context must be kept in mind to prevent 'attempts to read this language primarily in existentialist, individualist terms, [because] the context provided by both Zechariah's song (1:68-79) and the introduction to chap. 3 calls for an eschatological reading centered on the restoration of God's people'.<sup>116</sup>

That forgiveness of sins should be understood within this broader context might further be demonstrated by returning to the immediate context of Isaiah 40:3-5 that Luke uses to interpret John's message. For in the Hebrew text of Isaiah 40:1-2 Israel is said to be comforted precisely because her 'penalty is paid (*awo-na nir-sa(h)*)', whilst the Greek text of the Septuagint grounds her coming comfort in the fact that '*her sin has been pardoned (lēlutai autēs he harmatia)*'.<sup>117</sup> Thus as mentioned above, the context of

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<sup>112</sup>N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People Of God: Christian Origins And The Question of God*, (London: SPCK, 1992), 126–27, 246–58.

<sup>113</sup> For Israel's sin as the cause of her exile see Lev. 26:27-35; Deut. 4:25-31,40; 8:19-20; 28:36-37, 62-68; Isa. 6:8-13; Jer. 1:13-15; 5:14-18; 6:11-12, 22-26; 7:32-34; 8:1-3; 9:13-16; 10:17-22; 12:14-17; 13:20-27; 17:4; 20:4-6; Ezek. 7:21-26; 16:59-62; 44:5-9; Micah 4:10.

<sup>114</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 269. See Isa. 40:3, Jer. 31:31,34,38,40; Ezek. 36:24-25,28.

<sup>115</sup> Wright, 115. See also Wright, *The New Testament and the People Of God: Christian Origins And The Question of God*, 338.

<sup>116</sup> Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 73.

<sup>117</sup> The verb *lēlutai*, from *luō*, translated here as 'done away' has a range of meanings that gather around the idea of setting something free, delivering something or bringing something to an end, but it can also

restoration of the people of God in the infancy narratives, when placed alongside the quotation of Isaiah 40:3-5 and the comprehensive focus of John's ministry to 'all the people' (3:21, 7:29), suggests that the forgiveness of sins here has a strongly corporate dimension. This is not to argue that it demanded no individual response, but simply that the emphasis falls on YHWH declaring that Israel's sins are forgiven, and the promised time of restoration has begun.

### Fruits Worthy

If the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins spoke of a fresh break with the past and a renewed commitment of obedience to God, John makes it clear that these acts alone are not enough, and their repentance must be fleshed out and given integrity in concrete material actions: They must live lives that reflect their renewed allegiance by bearing 'fruits worthy of repentance' (3:8). So important are these actions that they become the basis upon which one will either be rescued or condemned to the fire (Luke 3:9).<sup>118</sup> The kind of 'fruit' that God is looking for from the people is spelled out by John in response to the question 'what therefore shall we do', which is asked by the crowds, the toll collectors, and soldiers.<sup>119</sup> What is also important to note here is that there is an intrinsic and causal relationship between John's message and the three sets of questions that follow. This relationship can be demonstrated by the natural flow of the narrative where the question 'what *therefore* shall we do'<sup>120</sup> follows on from John's message, and by the repeated use of the verb '*poieō*' (bear/do/produce) both in John's demands (3:8,9) and the people's questions in response (3:10,12,14).<sup>121</sup> Thus it is clear that it is this particular message that shapes a particular response from the people and ultimately seeks to produce a particular type of fruit in the lives of those who respond in faith. It is Luke alone who includes this ethical instruction in his Gospel material and it serves to highlight his insistence that a proper response of repentance to the

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mean to forgive sins (cf. LXX Job 42:9-10; Sir 28:2 and Luke 6:37). The Targum of Isaiah also suggests that it is due to YHWH's forgiveness of Israel's sins that her promised restoration is coming. See Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987).

<sup>118</sup> Green argues that 'behaviour is not an add-on to conversion. Rather, conversionary practices are constitutive of conversion'. Joel B. Green, 'Embodying the Gospel: Two Exemplary Practices', *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 16.

<sup>119</sup> According to Nave this question is a 'characteristic Lukan literary device' that demonstrates what Luke understands as an appropriate response to the situation. See Luke 10:25, 18:18; Acts 2:37, 16:30, 22:10. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 150.; Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts*, 2015, 82.

<sup>120</sup> The use of the Greek particle '*oun*' in 3:10 grounds the response of the people in John's message.

<sup>121</sup> Lear JR, 'What Shall We Do? Eschatology and Ethics in Luke-Acts', 67.

proclamation of the word of God must not, indeed cannot, remain be limited to ritual action or abstract thought but must be embodied in a transformed lifestyle.

### *Crowds*

The first group to ask John the specific question ‘what shall we do?’, are those described as the ‘crowd’ (*ochlos*).<sup>122</sup> John’s response to their request is that ‘whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise’ (3:11). This exhortation to voluntary acts of generosity toward the naked and hungry has its roots in the Old Testament (Job 31:16-22; Isa. 58:7-8; Ezek. 18:7-9; Mic. 6:8) and through on into the Intertestamental Period,<sup>123</sup> and is considered by Jesus so central to Hebraic faith that it becomes a standard for later judgement (Luke 16:19-31). Taylor suggests that such a demand would have been ‘considered extraordinary’<sup>124</sup> by the crowd who heard it,<sup>125</sup> for it would have meant that even those who ‘may have had only one spare tunic (people who might themselves be considered poor) [would be asked] to give away this spare tunic to the begging poor, who dressed in rags’.<sup>126</sup> Precise economic reconstructions for first-century Palestine are notoriously difficult to pin down<sup>127</sup> but

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<sup>122</sup> ‘The crowds’ is a particularly Lukan term that according to Nave designates an anonymous audience that ‘alludes to the universal scope’ of the ministry and message of John and Jesus. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 151.

<sup>123</sup> For Old Testament see Job 31:16-22; Isa. 58:7-8; Ezek. 18:7-9; Mic. 6:8, and for intertestamental literature see Sir. 4:1,4,8, 7:32, 10:23, 11:12, 34:21, 35:2; Tob. 1:17; 4:16. Bock, *Luke 1*, 309. See also Christopher Francis Evans, *Saint Luke*, TPI New Testament Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1990), 240.

<sup>124</sup> Taylor, *John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism*, 123.

<sup>125</sup> Because ‘crowds’ is understood to be a Lukan term Hollenbach suggests that ‘we cannot trust’ it and that the ethical obligation suggests that it was aimed at the wealthy rather than the masses at large. This is in keeping with his argument that John’s critique was originally aimed at the elites, but appears highly speculative and causes him to have to do damage to the text to fit his argument, which is always a suspect methodology. Hollenbach, ‘Social Aspects of John the Baptizer’s Preaching Mission in the Context of Palestinian Judaism’, 870 n.68.

<sup>126</sup> Taylor, *John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism*, 123.

<sup>127</sup> The older perspective that split Greco-Roman society into the one percent of elites and the ninety-nine percent who lived in abject poverty has recently been challenged by more nuanced economic scales, but which still understand many as living in economic deprivation. For the older perspective see Justin Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 41–73. For those who argue for a more nuanced understanding see Peter Oakes, ‘Constructing Poverty Scales for Graeco-Roman Society: A Response to Steven Friesen’s “Poverty in Pauline Studies”’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 3 (March 2004): 367–71; Oakes; Richard L. Rohrbaugh, ‘Methodological Considerations in the Debate over the Social Class Status of Early Christians’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, no. 3 (September 1984): 519–46; John M. G. Barclay, ‘Poverty in Pauline Studies: A Response to Steven Friesen’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 3 (March 2004): 363–66; Steven J Friesen, ‘Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the so-Called New Consensus’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 3 (March 2004): 323–61; Walter Scheidel and Steven J. Friesen, ‘The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 99 (January 2009): 61–91; Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010), 36–59.



what is clear here is that John did not expect only the wealthy to share their resources with those in need but rather called upon anyone who had anything to spare to contribute. This ethic that John was calling for from the 'crowds' thus moved beyond mere patronage and toward a more communal practice and attitude of sharing.<sup>128</sup>

### *Toll Collectors*

The second group who ask the dangerous question 'what should we do' are the more specific demographic of 'toll collectors' (*telōnēs*)<sup>129</sup> who were considered a 'particularly offensive subgroup of those who [had] journeyed out to participate in John's ministry'.<sup>130</sup> Under the Roman Empire in the first century, direct taxes were collected by the central authority in that region, whether that be the prefect or the tetrarch, but indirect taxes were collected by those who had bid and won the right to collect them within a specific geographic area.<sup>131</sup> Those wealthy enough to win this privilege then sold this capacity to others, who in turn often employed local people to act as toll booth collectors or tax office agents, and it was these people that actually harvested the taxes and that we meet in the pages of the Gospels.<sup>132</sup> Thus this system produced a 'hierarchy of tax collectors'<sup>133</sup> who had each 'paid for the privilege of collecting taxes'<sup>134</sup> and who would each then collect in revenue more than they were legally supposed to and thus make a profit at the people's expense.<sup>135</sup>

It appears that it was the dishonesty, extortion and violence involved in the collecting of taxes, rather than the actual role itself that pricked Jewish sensibilities,<sup>136</sup> and whilst this may have led to them being ostracised by their community, it is not clear that this meant their being considered ritually 'unclean'.<sup>137</sup> They were however looked down upon in

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<sup>128</sup> E.H. Scheffler, 'The Social Ethics of the Lucan Baptist (Lk 3:10-14)', *Neotestamentica*, no. 1 (1990): 31.

<sup>129</sup> According to Donahue, tax collectors collected direct taxes, whilst toll collectors collected indirect taxes and is therefore a more accurate translation of *τελωνης*. John R. Donahue, 'Tax Collectors and Sinners an Attempt at Identification', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 1971): 54.

<sup>130</sup> Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts*, 2015, 83.

<sup>131</sup> Donahue, 'Tax Collectors and Sinners an Attempt at Identification', 48.

<sup>132</sup> Donahue, 48-49.; Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 155.

<sup>133</sup> Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 155.

<sup>134</sup> Nave, 155.

<sup>135</sup> Nave, 155.

<sup>136</sup> Maccoby writes that 'a tax collector is not automatically unclean just because he is a tax-collector' but rather because of their methods of collection. Hyam Maccoby, 'How Unclean Were Tax-Collectors?', *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, no. 2 (2001): 61.

<sup>137</sup> Maccoby challenges the assumption that simply being a tax collection made one impure, whilst Donahue challenges the claim that it was their contact with Gentiles that rendered them such. Both contend that the toll collectors were disdained due to their immoral collection of monies. Maccoby, 'How Unclean Were Tax-Collectors?'; Donahue, 'Tax Collectors and Sinners an Attempt at Identification'.

Jewish society and often lumped in the same category as thieves, robbers, money-changers and murderers, and as willing participants in an unjust and corrupt system.<sup>138</sup> Therefore the Jew that was employed as a toll collector effectively ‘cut himself off from decent society’<sup>139</sup> and is often associated alongside those labelled in the New Testament as ‘sinners’<sup>140</sup> (Luke 5:30, 7:34, 15:1, 18:11).<sup>141</sup>

It was these toll collectors then, that were said to be responding positively to John’s message of repentance and his answer to them, maybe surprisingly, was not to quit their profession, but that they might ‘collect no more than the amount prescribed’ (3:13).<sup>142</sup> This however would mean a radical break with past practices and a total transformation of their relationships with fellow Jews. They would now have to turn from worldly wealth accumulated by means of ‘extortion, surcharges, kickbacks, payoffs, or bribes’<sup>143</sup> and turn toward a vocation of business conducted fairly as ‘honest stewards’.<sup>144</sup> Fruits worthy of repentance for the toll collectors, like the ‘crowd’ before them, took the form of concrete material practices of justice toward one’s neighbour that would reflect God’s will as demonstrated in community (cf. Luke 19:1-10).

### *Soldiers*

The third group that are specifically identified as asking ‘what shall we do’ are designated simply as ‘soldiers’ (*strateuō*). There are question marks over whether these are Roman or Jewish soldiers but John’s earlier attack on false trust in Abrahamic lineage, the ‘Israel-focused’ nature of John’s ministry and the gradual narrative development of Gentile engagement, all point toward these soldiers as being Jewish.<sup>145</sup> John’s response to this particular group comes in two stages; the first is that they are

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<sup>138</sup> For example, see m. Tehar. 7.6-8; m. Hag. 3:6; b. Bek.30b; ‘Abod. Zar. 39a; m. Ned. 3.4; Demai 2:2f; t.Demai 2:2; t.B. Mes. 8:25. Michel Otto, ‘telones’, TDNT 8:88-105, Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 155-157; Brink, *Soldiers in Luke-Acts: Engaging, Contradicting, and Transcending the Stereotypes*, 101. However, this evidence is dated from a period later than the New Testament and therefore cannot be relied upon too heavily. See Neale, *None but the Sinners*, 75.

<sup>139</sup> Michel Otto, ‘telones’, TDNT 8:88-105

<sup>140</sup> Sinners might be considered ‘those who represent a whole complex of behaviour that is opposed to God and his ways’. Neale, *None but the Sinners*, 95. For a discussion of who might be considered a ‘sinner’ and why see pages 68-97.

<sup>141</sup> See also Matt 9:10,11, 11:19; Mark 2:15,16.

<sup>142</sup> Maccoby argues that toll collectors would probably have had to give up their position due to the corruption associated with the role but that it is ‘possible’ for one to remain a toll collector if ‘he determined to go against the grain and be an honest one’. He cites b. BK 113a and this text (Luke 3:13) as evidence. Maccoby, ‘How Unclean Were Tax-Collectors?’, 63.

<sup>143</sup> Bock, *Luke 1*, 313.

<sup>144</sup> Bock, 312.

<sup>145</sup> Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 156-157.

‘not to extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation’, and the second is that they should ‘be satisfied with their wages’ (3:14).<sup>146</sup> We will look at each in turn.

The first instruction, more negative in nature, calls for the soldiers to not extort money by threat or false accusation. The verb used here for extortion (*diaseiō*) has connotations of shaking something violently and according to Darrell Bock it might be considered equivalent to our slang term of extorting money by means of ‘shaking someone down’.<sup>147</sup> The related term for false accusation (*sykophanteō*) implies the bringing of ‘false charges against someone, especially with the intent of personal profit’.<sup>148</sup> This thuggery and abuse of power was not unknown among soldiers in the ancient world<sup>149</sup> but its association here with monetary gain implies a close relationship between the soldiers and tax collectors and therefore how they might be perceived by the wider community. In fact, in Josephus’ account of Joseph’s collecting of taxes for King Ptolemy, he is said to have taken two thousand soldiers with him when harvesting the money. Therefore, Luke’s explicit mention of these two groups together here might suggest that they could have had a reputation for working together toward dishonest wealth and that their presence in Luke’s narrative should not occasion surprise.<sup>150</sup>

The second instruction that John has for the soldiers is that they are to be ‘satisfied with their wages’ (3:14). The term for wages (*opsōnion*) is a military term used for ‘payment made to soldiers as ration money’<sup>151</sup> and just as in his advice to the toll collectors, John does not demand that they leave their means of employment but simply that they act justly and righteously within such a role. The call to be satisfied with their wages may be due to the fact that any potential increase in their pay might well have come about via greater levels of exploitation and therefore at the expense of the poor as it would have been these who would have borne the brunt of such oppression. John’s demands of the soldiers then, in light of the impending coming of God, is similar in nature to that

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<sup>146</sup> There is a remarkable similarity here to the advice that Josephus gives to soldiers when he advised them ‘to fight with nobody, nor to spoil the country, but to pitch their tents in the plain, and be content with their sustenance’. *Jos. Life*. 244.

<sup>147</sup> Bock, *Luke 1*, 313.

<sup>148</sup> L&N 33.434.

<sup>149</sup> See P. Oxy II.240; P.London 1171; PTebt 1:43; P. Tor I.1; BGU 1756; Alleg. Interp. 2.99. Laurie Brink, *Soldiers in Luke-Acts: Engaging, Contradicting, and Transcending the Stereotypes*, 101.; Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 157.

<sup>150</sup> Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 157.

<sup>151</sup> L&N 57.166.

demanded of the toll-collectors; both were to demonstrate their repentance by turning from using their positions of power and authority in an abusive and oppressive manner in order to gain financially and to turn towards treating the members of their community in a just and fair way.

### Summary

In summary then it has been suggested that John's baptism drew upon the ritual cleansing ideas of the Old Testament cult but stood within a prophetic tradition that developed these ideas by linking the idea of washing or cleansing to a time of eschatological forgiveness of sins. Submission to John's baptism was also an act of repentance on behalf of the people and demonstrated their renewed commitment to walking in God's ways and which would only be effective if partnered with a life that produced fruits worthy of such repentance.

### Community

Having already explored John's message and the response that it demanded from its listeners, we now turn our attention in this third section, to the communal implications of such claims and activities. Earlier in our discussion we highlighted Luke 1:17 as a key for our understanding of John's purpose for it is here that the angel Gabriel says that John will be one who will 'make ready a people prepared for the Lord'. Much of the subsequent discussion will be around what it might mean for John to undertake such a task.

### Covenant

As mentioned several times already, John was a prophet and due to the covenantal dimension of God's relationship with his people<sup>152</sup> the historic prophetic call had always contained a strong 'ecclesial'<sup>153</sup> element to it whereby it addressed Israel as a corporate body. To fail to recognise this or 'to deny the corporate nature of those who received repentance-baptism would require explicit evidence of John individualizing both the judgment and restoration as well as the covenant promises, ideas which would be quite distinctive in John's Palestinian Jewish context'.<sup>154</sup> On first appearances Dale Allison

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<sup>152</sup> The unique contribution of the extensive work of Holladay was to highlight the strong covenantal element of repentance in the Old Testament. Holladay, *The Root Sûbh in the Old Testament with Particular Reference to Its Usages in Covenantal Contexts*..

<sup>153</sup> Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2002), 119-122.

<sup>154</sup> Robert L. Webb, 'Jesus' Baptism: Its Historicity and Implications', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10, no. 2 (2000): 202. N.T Wright puts it this way 'this needs to be emphasized in the strongest possible terms: the

takes steps toward such a position by stating that ‘despite the plurals (‘stones’, ‘children’), all focus is on the individual, whose deliverance is guaranteed only by a radical turning around, by a repentance which produces good fruit’.<sup>155</sup> He goes on however, to nuance this statement by suggesting that John ‘is not overturning the fundamental idea of covenant but rather repudiating the popular understanding of what the Abrahamic covenant entailed’.<sup>156</sup> Therefore the ecclesial or communal assumption of John’s message is not what is in question here for God’s covenant with his people still stands, but rather it is the wrongful assumptions regarding participation within the covenant people of God that John has been attacking. It is worth noting that this did not mean that Israel, and thus John, had no concept or value for the individual,<sup>157</sup> or that the address did not demand an individual response,<sup>158</sup> but that the broader and more crucial question is ‘whether or not the individual belongs to the people to be saved’.<sup>159</sup>

Again, as just mentioned, it is precisely this question regarding who belongs to the community of salvation that assumes centre-stage in John’s ministry. This can be seen in the way that he subverts traditional grounds for participation within the people of God by rejecting the privilege of Abrahamic lineage and replacing it with allegiance to God as demonstrated in baptism and a transformed lifestyle. John’s demand for an appropriate response in light of God’s coming visitation created something of a fracture and division within Israel between those who accepted his message and those who did not (cf. Luke 7:29-30).

Webb puts it this way:

John’s baptizing ministry, therefore, created a fundamental distinction between two groups of people: those who received the repentance-baptism and those who were unrepentant; those who were forgiven and those who were unforgiven;

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most natural meaning of the phrase ‘the forgiveness of sins’ to a first-century Jew is not in the first instance the remission of *individual* sins, but the putting away of the whole nation’s sins’. Wright, *The New Testament and the People Of God: Christian Origins And The Question of God*, 273.

<sup>155</sup> Allison Jr, ‘Jesus and the Covenant’, 60.

<sup>156</sup> Allison Jr, 60.

<sup>157</sup> Rowley argues in this article that ‘in no period of the life of Israel do we find extreme collectivism or extreme individualism, but a combination of both’. Harold Henry Rowley, ‘Individual and Community in the Old Testament’, *Theology Today* 12, no. 4 (January 1956): 491–510.

<sup>158</sup> We will discuss the idea of the remnant below but Manson suggests that with ‘the doctrine of the Remnant a decisive step is taken towards the individualising of religion; and this religious individualism modifies in one essential matter the idea of a people of God’. T. W Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus; Studies of Its Form and Content.*, 1st paperback edition (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 177.

<sup>159</sup> Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus*, 121.

those who were purified and those who were unclean...while John addressed his message to all Israel, the effect of that message was to divide them into these two sets of people.<sup>160</sup>

As a result of this 'purifying' element of John's ministry it might be suggested that those who did respond in faith to John's message of repentance might then be understood in terms of the biblical concept of the 'remnant',<sup>161</sup> for the remnant should be understood as that part of the wider community that escapes the sifting judgments of God. Thus John's warnings of coming wrath dovetail perfectly with the idea of a saved remnant, for 'in biblical and extra-biblical literature, everywhere, always, and without exception, the remnant is defined by judgment'.<sup>162</sup> In the words of Manson, 'the remnant is what is left when the judgement is overpast'.<sup>163</sup> The difference here is that the judgement is close at hand rather than already actualised, and therefore those who submit to John's call might be considered a proleptic remnant, the community of those saved before the axe blade falls or the fire of judgement is kindled. They are those who, whilst originally part of the wider group, now begin to 'represent it and continue its inheritance',<sup>164</sup> and who 'concentrate in [themselves] the life and promise of the community'.<sup>165</sup> They become as it were 'the true people of God'.<sup>166</sup> At this point it is worth noting Miller's observation that:

From the start, Luke challenges his readers with the knowledge that God's reign offers joy and redemption for those disadvantaged by the status quo, but not through a convenient or limited grace. It will include everyone willing to abide by

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<sup>160</sup> Webb, *John the Baptist and Prophet*, 197; R. Newton Flew and 1938 Fernley-Hartley lectures, *Jesus and His Church: A Study of the Idea of the Ecclesia in the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1956), 37.

<sup>161</sup> For a thorough and full-blooded defence of the 'remnant' theme as present in Second Temple Judaism see Mark Adam Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>162</sup> Ben F. Meyer, 'Jesus and the Remnant of Israel', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84, no. 2 (1965): 127. See also Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, chp. 2. 'The Judgement-of-Israel Theme', 57-113.

<sup>163</sup> Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus; Studies of Its Form and Content*, 176. Other examples include Gen 45:7; 2 Chr 30:6, Ezra 9:7-15; Isa 11:11,16; Jer 23:3, 42:2-22, 43:5; Ezek 11:13-21; Amos 3:12, 5:3,15, Mic 4:7; Zeph 3:12-13; Hag 1:12.

<sup>164</sup> Rowley, 'Individual and Community in the Old Testament', 506.

<sup>165</sup> Rowley, 507.

<sup>166</sup> Brown understands those who were baptised returning as 'consecrated members of a renewed Israel'. Colin Brown, 'What Was John the Baptist Doing?', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 45.; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 160. See also Burnett, 'Eschatological Prophet of Restoration', 12. Contra Taylor who sees 'absolutely nothing about John's message [that] requires us to assume that he intended to immerse people to form an exclusive group that might deem themselves to be God's faithful remnant in the last days'. Taylor, *John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism*, 148.

God's alternate values, even those who make us uncomfortable, those whom we dislike, and those who, in our opinion, *should* be disadvantaged or outcast.<sup>167</sup>

Therefore, this renewed people of God will appear to include those that in the past had been marginalised but who now, through true repentance, will participate in the salvation that God is offering. This is a theme that is important to Luke and that we will pick up later in the chapters on Jesus and the Early Church.

## Qumran

For an intriguing parallel use of Isaiah 40:3-5, and analogous identification of a group as the remnant of Israel, we turn now to the contemporaneous community at Qumran, who lived a communal existence together just outside Jerusalem. In the document 1QS there are a couple of clear references to Isaiah 40:3 that help shed light on how this community understood both the text itself and the community's relation to it.<sup>168</sup>

Snodgrass argues that 'the suggestion that Isaiah 40:3 inspires the faith and provides the philosophy of the Qumran movement is no exaggeration even though the text is not quoted frequently'.<sup>169</sup> Tzoref argues along similar lines when she writes that Isaiah 40:3 is used to 'validate an over-arching principle... of the Community, rather than to support specific rules of conduct'.<sup>170</sup> When it is explicitly quoted in 1QS 8:14-16, Isaiah 40:3 is used to assert the reason for the community retreating into the wilderness,<sup>171</sup> and describes the 'preparing the way of Lord' specifically as the study of Torah.<sup>172</sup> In 1QS 9:19 there is a further allusion to Isaiah 40 that also links the community's preparation

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<sup>167</sup> Miller writes this in regard to Jesus' sermon in Nazareth but the point stands with regards to John's ministry as well. Emphasis in quote is original to Miller. Amanda C. Miller, 'Good Sinners and Exemplary Heretics: The Sociopolitical Implications of Love and Acceptance in the Gospel of Luke', *Review & Expositor (Online)* 112, no. 3 (August 2015): 463.

<sup>168</sup> There are also references and allusions to Isaiah 40:3 in 1QS 4:2 and 4Q176 but these are less relevant for our study.

<sup>169</sup> Snodgrass, 'Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40', 28.

<sup>170</sup> Shani Tzoref, 'The Use of Scripture in the Community Rule', *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*, 2012, 210. See also Susan J Wendel, *Scriptural Interpretation and Community Self-Definition in Luke-Acts and the Writings of Justin Martyr* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 76-79.

<sup>171</sup> There is some discussion as to whether the wilderness in Isaiah 40:3 has any geographic relevance for the community but there is good evidence to suggest that it applied to both the place (wilderness) and purpose (study of Torah) of the community. See Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel Israel's Re-Gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke-Acts*, 217-218; George J Brooke, 'Isaiah 40:3 and the Wilderness Community', in *New Qumran Texts and Studies: Proceedings of the First Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Paris, 1992* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1994), 117-32; Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, 57 nn.2, 594 n.43.

<sup>172</sup> Tzoref, 'The Use of Scripture in the Community Rule', 211.

of the way of the Lord with Torah instruction, the result of which is 'that a man may walk perfectly with his neighbour in all that has been revealed to them'.<sup>173</sup>

In her analysis of Qumran's use of Isaiah 40:3 in comparison with that of the New Testament, Tzoref suggests that 'the sources attest to a shared exegetical tradition, associating Isa 40:3 with community formation, withdrawal from the Jerusalem establishment, and revelatory preaching by a charismatic leader'.<sup>174</sup> After presenting these similarities, Tzoref goes on to suggest that a key difference lies in how they understand what it means to prepare the way of the Lord. For the Qumran community the focus was on the study of Torah, whilst the Synoptic Gospels' focus is on John's baptism and call to repentance.<sup>175</sup> This retreat away from the masses to form a separate community in fulfilment of Isaiah 40 dovetails well with Qumran's understanding of themselves in terms of a remnant. In the Damascus document we read of how, during the Babylonian exile, God 'left a remnant to Israel, and gave them not over to destruction' and how the Qumran community stood in continuity with such a group (CD 1.3-12).<sup>176</sup> Those who 'turned aside out of the way and abhorred the statute' are denied any survivors but despite their falling 'he raised up men called by name in order to leave a remnant to the earth, and to fill the face of the earth with their seed' (CD 2:4-9. Cf. 5:1-2).

So here we are presented with a community of people who self-identified using Isaiah 40:3 and therefore retreated to the wilderness in obedience so that they might prepare the way of the Lord and live out their existence as the remnant, the true people of God. There are obvious similarities here between the Qumran community and John and his followers, with the main difference being how they understood how to undertake their role of preparation, but it only serves to further highlight the communal implications and appropriate context of John's message.

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<sup>173</sup> Snodgrass, 'Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40', 29.

<sup>174</sup> Tzoref, 'The Use of Scripture in the Community Rule', 216. T.S. Ferda likewise notes that 'John is similar to the sectarians in that his 'preparation' had a concrete accompanying rite (baptism instead of 'study God's law') and a corporate dimension: a people must become ready for the eschatological advent of Israel's God'. Tucker S. Ferda, 'John the Baptist, Isaiah 40, and the Ingathering of the Exiles', *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 10, no. 2 (1 January 2012): 177.

<sup>175</sup> Tzoref, 'The Use of Scripture in the Community Rule', 216.

<sup>176</sup> Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, 626-28.



## Summary

In concluding this section on community, it has been established that John's message to Israel assumed a corporate element as the people already stood within a prior covenant relationship with God, but that it also caused a division within the people of God. Those who responded in faithfulness then became part of the remnant, the true Israel who stood to survive God's coming judgment, much like how the Qumran community understood themselves. What is also particularly interesting to note is that is those who stood on the margins of the people of God, the toll collectors and soldiers, who are highlighted by Luke as having responded to John and therefore suggest that this community being created by the word of God may include unlikely participants.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that John's proclamation of the word of God concerned both salvation and judgement and was framed within God's programme of promised restoration. The reality of the imminent arrival of this comforting and disturbing visitation demanded a response from the people, which was found in their submission to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of their sins. This rite was a powerfully symbolic and multi-faceted act that pictured the people's submission to God, their cleansing from sin, and their participation in the promised restoration. However, they were also warned that their assurance of inclusion within the people of God was based not upon any biological connection to Abraham, but rather in their repentance and obedience to God's word. In fact, John demanded that they produce 'fruits worthy of repentance', to be understood as deeds of socio-economic justice and generosity toward others that reflected the values and priorities of God's coming reign. Thus, their vertical repentance toward God was demonstrated horizontally in their good deeds toward each other.

Whilst Luke highlights the comprehensive reach of John's ministry, he also explicitly mentions both 'toll collectors' and 'soldiers' as submitting to John's baptism and challenge. Such characters carried a stigma and reputation for their abuse of power and possessions and therefore their repentance here is dramatic and unexpected. The sense of subversion and reversal, symbolised in Isaiah's transformed landscape, begins to germinate as outsiders are now welcomed in, and presumed insiders are threatened

with exclusion. The community that is beginning to form is being marked from the outset as one that will be graced by the presence of devoted, but unlikely, participants.

## Chapter Two: Jesus

### Introduction

In this chapter, we will continue to trace the same three themes of ‘message’, ‘response’, and ‘community’, but this time in relation to Jesus. Due to limitations regarding scope, I have had to be selective in the material included in this investigation but have chosen that which I believe is representative. Regarding Jesus’ message, I have chosen his speech at the synagogue at Nazareth and argue that his quotation of Isaiah 61:1-2 defines his mission and should be understood as the heralding of the eschatological jubilee. For the theme of ‘response’, I have surveyed material that uses ‘repentance’ vocabulary, for whilst the theme is present outside such explicit uses, ‘repentance’ appears to be the broader category within which other responses are subsumed. For ‘community’, I have chosen the parable of the Great Banquet as it presents a picture of the type of gathering that formed in response to Jesus’ message and demand for repentance. In concluding the chapter, we will briefly look at Luke 8:1-21 and the parable of the Sower, as it encapsulates and draws together the ‘message’, ‘response’, and ‘community’ aspects of Jesus’ ministry in a condensed fashion.

### Message

As mentioned above, in examining Jesus’ message we will focus our attention on his sermon in Nazareth due to its paradigmatic nature and importance within the narrative. Tannehill has suggested four criteria by which to judge such things: the first is the presence of a major Old Testament quotation; the second is the articulation of a divine commission; the third is the way in which the text reviews or previews the narrative; and the fourth is the disclosure of God’s purposes from the lips of a reliable character, all of which are found here.<sup>177</sup> Green adds further evidence by noting that this is the first narrated description of Jesus’ public ministry, that it stands as an articulation of earlier preaching episodes, and that it is referred back to by later summaries.<sup>178</sup> All the evidence thus supports Fitzmyer’s assertion that ‘Luke has deliberately put this story at

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<sup>177</sup> Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 61.

<sup>178</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 207.

the beginning of the public ministry to encapsulate the entire ministry of Jesus and the reaction to it'.<sup>179</sup>

In 4:14-15, Luke mentions that Jesus had begun to teach in the synagogues of Galilee, but it is only in 4:16 when the narrative slows down and zooms in, that we are given a glimpse of the message that he had been sharing. Having been handed the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus found the text of 61:1-2,<sup>180</sup> which he duly read and then proclaimed as fulfilled in the sight of all in attendance. The language here echoes that from Jesus' baptism<sup>181</sup> and articulates the purpose of such an empowering in the form of four infinitival phrases:<sup>182</sup> the first is to preach good news to the poor; the second is to proclaim release for the captives and sight to the blind; the third is to let the oppressed go free; and the fourth is to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. So, in quoting this scripture as fulfilled in his person, Jesus identifies himself as the divinely empowered eschatological agent of God's present favour. Having identified his message and mission, the questions now facing us are 'what is the nature of this good news', and 'how should we understand the identities of those to whom the message was directed'?

### Good News of Jubilee

In determining the content of the good news being proclaimed, it is important to note that Isaiah 61:1-2 is couched in terms and ideas taken from the biblical concept of jubilee. In fact, Bergsma described it as 'the most widely recognised biblical allusion to the jubilee outside of the Pentateuch'.<sup>183</sup> The jubilee legislation of Leviticus 25, according to Rodgers, had four main requirements: that every fiftieth year would see the return of all property to their original owners; that there would be a release of all Israelite slaves;

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<sup>179</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 529. Mark (6:1-6) and Matthew (13:53-58) omit any detail of the message preached and place the episode later in their Gospels. Luke Timothy Johnson and Daniel J Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 80-81.

<sup>180</sup> The quotation predominantly follows the LXX, with the main differences between Isaiah 61:1-2 in the LXX and Jesus' quotation in Luke 4:18-19 being the omission of 'to heal the broken-hearted' (61:1d) and 'the day of vengeance/retribution' (61:2b), plus the insertion of 'to let the oppressed go free' from Isaiah 58:6d. For a fuller discussion of the textual and grammatical details see Charles Kimball, 'Jesus' Exposition of Scripture in Luke 4:16-30: An Inquiry in Light of Jewish Hermeneutics', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 21, no. 3 (September 1994): 183-84; Christopher R Bruno, "Jesus Is Our Jubilee"...but How?: The OT Background and Lukan Fulfillment of the Ethics of Jubilee', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 1 (March 2010): 96; Paul Hertig, 'The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversals of Fortunes', *Missiology* 26, no. 2 (April 1998): 171-72.

<sup>181</sup> Both the baptism and Nazareth episodes describe the 'Spirit' (*pneuma*) being 'upon' (*epi*) Jesus (3:22, 4:18).

<sup>182</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 207.

<sup>183</sup> John S. Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*. (Brill, 2006), 198.

a cancellation of all debts; and that the land would lie fallow for a year.<sup>184</sup> Bruno argues that the enactment of these laws would mean that ‘the economy [was] “reset” to avoid endemic oppression’<sup>185</sup> and would have meant the ‘restoration of the proper order among the covenant people, the covenant land, and the covenant God’.<sup>186</sup> Thus, at its core, the jubilee addressed themes of liberation and restitution.

But what grounds are there for suggesting that the jubilee motif is present within Isaiah 61:1-2?<sup>187</sup> Sloan argues that there are three main points of contact between the jubilee traditions and Isaiah 61, plus an extra one in Luke 4 due to the insertion from Isaiah 58.<sup>188</sup>

With regards to Isaiah 61, he first suggests a parallel between the climactic term ‘to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord’ in Isaiah (61:2a), and the year of the proclamation of liberty in Leviticus (25:10).<sup>189</sup> Secondly, he argues that due to its associations with jubilee traditions in the Septuagint, the proclamation of release (*aphesis*) to captives (Isa. 61:1e) serves as ‘the primary theological and verbal connection’<sup>190</sup> with such themes.<sup>191</sup> Thirdly, Sloan suggests that whilst there are no technical *verbal* links between the phrase ‘preach good news to the poor’ and the jubilee, there is a clear *thematic* link in that the proclamation of release from slavery and debt would be received as such.<sup>192</sup> Lastly, the additional reason for understanding the jubilee as present in Luke 4 is the insertion from Isaiah 58:6.<sup>193</sup> This is because the mention of the setting free (*aphesis*) of the oppressed, repeats and emphasises the

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<sup>184</sup> Margaret Rodgers, ‘Luke 4:16-30 - a Call for a Jubilee Year’, *The Reformed Theological Review* 40, no. 3 (September 1981): 73–74.

<sup>185</sup> Bruno, “‘Jesus Is Our Jubilee’...but How?’, 88.

<sup>186</sup> Bruno, 89.

<sup>187</sup> For a dissenting opinion that sees no jubilee here see D.P. O’Brien, ‘A Comparison between Early Jewish and Early Christian Interpretations of the Jubilee Year’, *Studia Patristica*, 2001, 436–42.

<sup>188</sup> Robert Bryan Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord: A Study of Jubiliary Theology in the Gospel of Luke* (Schola Press, 1977), 37f.

<sup>189</sup> Robert Bryan Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord* (Austin: Scholars Press, 1977), 36.

<sup>190</sup> Robert Bryan Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord: A Study of Jubiliary Theology in the Gospel of Luke* (Schola Press, 1977), 36–37.

<sup>191</sup> *Aphesis* is used twenty two times in the jubilee chapters of Leviticus 25 and 27 out of a total of fifty occurrences in the entire LXX. It also translates the Hebrew term ‘*deror*’ (release), which operated as a *terminus technicus* for the year of Jubilee. (Lev. 25:10; Isa. 61:1; Jer. 34:8,15,17; Ezek. 46:17). Sloan, 37; Bradley C Gregory, ‘The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah: Isaiah 61:1–3 in Light of Second Temple Hermeneutics’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 3 (September 2007): 484.

<sup>192</sup> Sloan also notes the connection between the Jubilee and Isaiah 61 in 11QMelch. Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord*, 41–42; J. Massyngberde Ford, *My Enemy Is My Guest: Jesus and Violence in Luke* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 55.

<sup>193</sup> This insertion replaces the original phrase that spoke of ‘binding up the broken-hearted’ in Isaiah 61:1d.

‘jubiliary’ term ‘*aphesis*’, and stems from a chapter which itself has strong jubilee overtones.<sup>194</sup>

So whilst Sloan and others appear justified in seeing Jubilee motifs as present in Isaiah 61:1-2 (and Luke 4:18-19),<sup>195</sup> it is also clear that this is no literal implementation, but rather a ‘prophetic use’<sup>196</sup> or ‘prophetic amplification’<sup>197</sup> of these traditions. The eschatological hopes of Israel have been refracted through the lens of the jubilee legislation to produce a prophetic word of liberation and restoration for the people of God.

### Who are the ‘Poor’

So, if we might legitimately understand the content of Luke 4:18-19 in terms of a proclamation of an eschatological jubilee, we still need to answer the second question regarding the identity of the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed. Seccombe, whilst acknowledging potential problems with assuming direct transference of meaning from Isaiah,<sup>198</sup> insists that it is still a legitimate source from which to explore how Luke may have understood such persons.<sup>199</sup> Due to the location of the text in what is considered Third Isaiah, Seccombe argues that ‘the poor’ should be understood as the nation returned from exile but still awaiting full restoration.<sup>200</sup> Thus the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed, function as ‘alternative descriptions of a single reality, [namely] Israel’s Captivity’,<sup>201</sup> and should be understood as such in Luke 4:18-19.

This reading, however, has by no means won universal approval. Heard for instance, suggests that ‘the poor’ are ‘an underclass comprised of the faithful within Israel who

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<sup>194</sup> Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord*; Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 195–97.

<sup>195</sup> See Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord*; Sharon H Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 36–45; Kimball, ‘Jesus’ Exposition of Scripture in Luke 4’; Bruno, “‘Jesus Is Our Jubilee’...but How?”; Rodgers, ‘Luke 4’; Sharon H Ringe, ‘Luke 4:16-44: A Portrait of Jesus as Herald of God’s Jubilee’, *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society (Grand Rapids, Mich.)* 1 (1981): 73–84.

<sup>196</sup> Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord*, 10.

<sup>197</sup> Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, 28.

<sup>198</sup> He highlights the different meanings of the poor found in Isaiah and the fact that Luke may have been influenced by other sources other than Isaiah, such as wider Christian and Jewish traditions, in his understanding of ‘the poor’. David P. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Linz: A. Fuchs, 1982), 36.

<sup>199</sup> Seccombe, 36. He argues this on the basis of Isaiah’s influence on Luke. See David P. Seccombe, ‘Luke and Isaiah’, *New Testament Studies* 27, no. 2 (January 1981): 252.

<sup>200</sup> See Isa 60:4, 62:8. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts*, 38–39.

<sup>201</sup> Seccombe, 57.

are victimised by social injustice'<sup>202</sup> and so should be understood primarily in *religious* terms.<sup>203</sup> Miller, on the other hand, wants to foreground the *socio-economic* aspect of the term and says that 'the Spirit-commissioned prophet of Isaiah 61 ... is addressing struggles not only (and perhaps not even most importantly) over ethnicity and nationality, but also over issues of status, money, and power'.<sup>204</sup> These differences of opinion are not easily resolved but Brueggemann takes a helpful position by concluding that whether the text refers to 'a community-wide restoration',<sup>205</sup> or whether it refers to '*the internal economics of the community*',<sup>206</sup> at its core it still concerns 'the rehabilitation of life out of impoverishment, powerlessness and despair'.<sup>207</sup>

### Qumran

An intriguing text in this regard is 11Q Melchizedek (11QM), which has been described as a 'pesher treatment'<sup>208</sup> on Sabbath and jubilee texts among others.<sup>209</sup> Here the jubilee traditions are given an eschatological setting described as 'the last days' (line 4) or the 'tenth and final jubilee' (line 7).<sup>210</sup> The eschatological use of these traditions is significant enough, but as Miller has convincingly argued, the interpretive framework of the whole text is Isaiah 61.<sup>211</sup> Isaianic influence can be felt throughout this passage by the presence of certain phrases and words: it can be seen for instance, in the use of the phrase 'proclamation of liberty' to 'captives' (lines 4,6; Isa. 61:1e);<sup>212</sup> in the mention of a 'year of favour' and the vengeance of God (lines 10-13; Isa. 61:2); and by the mention of one 'anointed of the Spirit' (line 18; Isa. 61:1a,b).<sup>213</sup> Therefore, the suggestion that Isaiah 61:1-2 reflects an eschatological jubilee is supported by a community contemporaneous with Jesus that read it in such terms.

<sup>202</sup> Warren Heard, 'Luke's Attitude toward the Rich and the Poor', *Trinity Journal* 9, no. 1 (1988): 50.

<sup>203</sup> Heard, 49.

<sup>204</sup> Amanda C. Miller, *Rumors of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2014), 145.

<sup>205</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 214.

<sup>206</sup> Brueggemann, 214.

<sup>207</sup> Emphasis Brueggemanns. Brueggemann, 214.

<sup>208</sup> Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 226-27.

<sup>209</sup> The texts are Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15, Isaiah 52, and Psalms 7 and 82.

<sup>210</sup> Merrill P Miller, 'Function of Isa 61:1-2 in 11Q Melchizedek', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 4 (December 1969): 467.

<sup>211</sup> Merrill P Miller, 'Function of Isa 61:1-2 in 11Q Melchizedek', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 4 (December 1969): 467-69.

<sup>212</sup> 'Proclamation of liberty' links Isaiah 61:1 to Leviticus 25:10. Miller, 467-68.

<sup>213</sup> Miller, 467-69.

Sanders argues that there were two fundamental axioms that shaped how Qumran read and understood the text of 11QM. The first is *eschatological* in that they felt they were living in the end times and thus prophecy was being fulfilled in their midst. The second is *ecclesiological* in that all the blessings associated with such prophecies were directed toward them, whilst all judgements were directed to those outside their group. Sanders, then argues that Jesus agreed with the first axiom regarding eschatology, but differed radically from Qumran on the second axiom regarding those who would receive God's blessings (i.e. the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed).<sup>214</sup> Therefore, if Qumran understood themselves as the poor who were to receive eschatological liberation,<sup>215</sup> who might Jesus have identified as such? To answer this, we must return to Luke's Gospel.

### Luke and Narrative Development

Given that there was a certain fluidity regarding the application of Isaiah 61 around the first century, it would appear improper to not allow Jesus the same freedom of interpretation.<sup>216</sup> Therefore, his understanding of this text should not be confined within a predetermined framework but interpreted by a close reading of Luke's narrative.<sup>217</sup>

In seeking the identity of 'the poor' within Luke's Gospel, it should be noted at the outset that the predominant New Testament term for 'poor' (*ptōchos*), and that which is used in Isaiah 61:1 (LXX), is found ten times in Luke and on each occasion an economic focus is evident.<sup>218</sup> Whilst much has been written on the difficult question regarding wealth and poverty in Luke-Acts, one thing that appears to be incontrovertible is that these themes are of central importance to the author. This is demonstrated not only by the

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<sup>214</sup> James A. Sanders, 'From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4', in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts*, ed. C. F. Evans and James A. Sanders (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1975), 62.

<sup>215</sup> For examples of vocabulary that express this conviction see IQpHab 12.3, 6, 10; IQM 11.9, 13; 13.13-14; CD 19.9; 4QpPs 37 4Q171) 2.9-10; IQH 10[=2].32, 54; 13[=5].13-18, 21; 23[=18].14. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003), 519; Heard, 'Luke's Attitude toward the Rich and the Poor', 50.

<sup>216</sup> Amanda C. Miller argues that with regard to Jesus' sermon in Nazareth, 'Luke is not making an unprecedented exegetical leap ... but is using scripture in a manner comparable to that of other communities of his time'. Miller, *Rumors of Resistance*, 157.

<sup>217</sup> For the importance of the narrative for understanding the meaning of the text see S. John Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor: Character Types in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 64-68.

<sup>218</sup> See Luke 4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 14:13, 21; 16:20, 22; 18:22; 19:8; 21:3. The possible exception may be 6:20 but even this is not clear. The only other term that Luke uses for 'poor' is '*penichros*' in 21:2, but even this is used synonymously here with '*ptōchos*'.



relevant texts that Luke shares with Matthew and Mark,<sup>219</sup> but more importantly, by the material found only in his Gospel: this includes his Beatitudes;<sup>220</sup> instructions on giving generously;<sup>221</sup> the parable of the friend at midnight;<sup>222</sup> the parable of the rich fool;<sup>223</sup> instructions on appropriate banquet invitations;<sup>224</sup> teaching on discipleship and possessions;<sup>225</sup> the parable of the clever manager;<sup>226</sup> the story of the rich man and Lazarus;<sup>227</sup> and the story of Zacchaeus.<sup>228</sup>

It would be a mistake however, to delimit the concern solely to economics for there are a number of occasions in the Gospel where the poor are listed alongside other characters such as the captive, the blind, the oppressed, the hungry, the lame, the mournful, the harassed, the deaf, the leper, the dead, the maimed, the leprous, and the widow.<sup>229</sup> As the term 'poor' almost always stands at the head of such lists,<sup>230</sup> Green suggests that it 'interprets and is amplified by the others'<sup>231</sup> and thus the 'poor' cannot be understood solely in economic terms.<sup>232</sup> He concludes by stating that 'the conjunction of these words in these Lukan lists points to the challenging dimensions of the new era Jesus proclaims, a reign that embraces those marginalised by religious leaders, those thus defined as outsiders'.<sup>233</sup>

Specifically, in Luke 4:18-19 the poor are linked with the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. The terms 'captives' (*aichmalōtos*) and 'oppressed' (*thrauō*) are similar in meaning<sup>234</sup> and are linked by the term 'release' (*aphesis*), as well as by the surprising

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<sup>219</sup> For a list of shared material see Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lukan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 165–67.

<sup>220</sup> Luke 6:20,24.

<sup>221</sup> Luke 6:27-36.

<sup>222</sup> Luke 11:5-8

<sup>223</sup> Luke 12:16-21.

<sup>224</sup> Luke 14:13,21.

<sup>225</sup> Luke 14:33

<sup>226</sup> Luke 16:1-13.

<sup>227</sup> Luke 16:19-31.

<sup>228</sup> Luke 19:1-10. See Esler, *[Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts]*, 168–69; Joel B. Green, 'Good News to the Poor: A Lukan Leitmotif', *Review & Expositor* 111, no. 2 (May 2014): 173–74.

<sup>229</sup> See 4:18, 6:20, 7:22, 14:13,21, 16:20,22, 21:2-4. Green, 'Good News to the Poor', 176.

<sup>230</sup> The only exception is 7:22 where it appears at the end of the list.

<sup>231</sup> Joel B. Green, 'Good News to Whom?', in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 68. See also Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor*, 26.

<sup>232</sup> See Moxnes' term 'embedded economy' to describe this dynamic. Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 22–42.

<sup>233</sup> Green, 'Good News to Whom?', 68.

<sup>234</sup> '*Aichmalōtos*' has two basic meanings according to Louw Nida, the first is the literal sense of being a prisoner of war, and the second is the more general meaning of anyone living under foreign domination.

fact that neither of them appear again in Luke-Acts! This is striking due to the programmatic nature of this quotation and is surely reason enough to suggest that these are representative characters whose presence here is symbolic. The two groups are linked by the term '*aphesis*', which highlights the theme of release and is associated throughout Luke's narrative with two main oppressive bondages, that of sin and that of the devil.

That Luke related the release of the captives and the oppressed with forgiveness of sins is demonstrable first and foremost from the fact that the only other uses of '*aphesis*' in Luke-Acts are all explicitly linked with forgiveness.<sup>235</sup> If sin might be understood as debt,<sup>236</sup> then the Jubilee offer of manumission would stand as a profound picture of eschatological forgiveness for all who stood in need of such a pardon (Luke 5:20-24, 7:47-49, 11:4, 24:47). Those deep in debt to God for their sins were to hear the proclamation of 'release' or 'forgiveness' from such conditions.

And although the term '*aphesis*' is only explicitly linked with forgiveness of sins, the idea of release from diabolic influence is certainly present also. For as Green points out 'it is no accident that Luke brings together the temptation story and Jesus' proclamation of his own missionary program [for] his ministry will be conducted in the arena of opposition, including battle with nonhuman forces'.<sup>237</sup> He goes on to highlight the teaching and exorcism in Capernaum (4:31-37), the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (4:38-39) and the summary of Jesus' healings and exorcisms (4:40-41) as immediate narrative examples of such emancipation.<sup>238</sup> It is important to also note that Jesus' Isaianic proclamation is summarised in 4:43 as the preaching of the 'good news of the

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L&N 55.25. '*Thrauō*' term carries with it the sense of suffering severe hardship and oppression to the point of being overwhelmed. L&N 22.22. '*Aichmalōtos*' in Isaiah 61 could have referred to Israel in exile or it could have referred to debt-slaves. For Israel in exile see Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts*, 57. For debt –slavery see Lawrence M Wills, 'The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity', *Harvard Theological Review* 77, no. 3-4 (July 1984): 38-39.

<sup>235</sup> See Luke 1:77, 3:3, 24:7; Acts 2:38, 5:31, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18. Not all understand it this way, see Turner, *Power from on High*, 244. In response see Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 240; Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, 71-80.

<sup>236</sup> See Jesus' analogy in Luke 7:36-50 and the description of Isaiah 61's Jubilee release as forgiveness of the 'debt of iniquity' in 11QMelch (cf. Luke 11:4). See also Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (Yale University Press, 2009), 27-43.

<sup>237</sup> Joel B. Green, 'Jesus and a Daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:10-17): Test Case for a Lucan Perspective on Jesus' Miracles', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (October 1989): 653.

<sup>238</sup> For seeing the choice of healing or deliverance as a false dichotomy see Dennis Hamm, 'The Freeing of the Bent Woman and the Restoration of Israel: Luke 13:10-17 as Narrative Theology', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (October 1987): 32-33.

kingdom of God',<sup>239</sup> for this is later associated in the Gospel with the plundering of Satan's stronghold (11:14-22). In fact, in Acts 10:38, Luke summarises Jesus' ministry as one who 'went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil' (cf. Luke 10:18, 13:10-17; Acts 2:22). Therefore, the good news should not be understood as release solely from the debt of sin, but also from the bondage of demonic forces.

The 'recovery of sight to the blind' here appears to have both a literal and metaphorical element to it. It is literally fulfilled inasmuch as Jesus often healed the physically blind (Luke 7:21, 18:35-43; Acts 9:18-19), but it also functions 'as a metaphor for receiving revelation and experiencing salvation (Luke 2:28-32; Acts 26:28. Cf. Luke 3:6).<sup>240</sup> Dennis Hamm and others have demonstrated that this aspect of Luke's work is an extension of the language and imagery from Isaiah that framed salvation in terms of sight and seeing.<sup>241</sup> Thus Luke's earlier quotation of Isaiah 40:3-5 climaxed with the statement that 'all flesh will see the salvation of God' (3:6).

If then, we are correct in allowing Luke's narrative to be the primary determiner of the identity of the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed, then it appears that these terms do not describe Israel *in toto*, but are used to refer to all those in some sort of need of God's gracious provision; something hinted at by Jesus' mention of Elijah's ministry to a Sidonian widow, and Elisha's healing of Naaman the Syrian (4:24-27).

### Summary

In examining Jesus' sermon at Nazareth as representative of the message that he proclaimed, I have demonstrated the following points: the first is that Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 61:1-2 evoked the hope of an eschatological jubilee that focused on the theme of 'release'; the second, is that whilst John spoke of that which was imminent, Jesus spoke of that which was now present and fulfilled; the third is that in the first century there was a measure of fluidity regarding the use of these jubilee traditions and that

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<sup>239</sup> For the kingdom of God as associated with healings and exorcisms see Luke 8:1-2, 9:1-6, 11, 10:1-11, 11:20; Acts 8:5-13.

<sup>240</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 211.

<sup>241</sup> For example, see Luke 2:32 (Isa. 49:6), 3:4-6 (Isa. 40:3-5), 4:18 (Isa. 61:1), 7:22 (Isa. 29:18, 61:1). Dennis Hamm, 'Sight to the Blind: Vision as Metaphor in Luke', *Biblica* 67, no. 4 (1986): 457-77; B. E. Wilson, 'Hearing the Word and Seeing the Light: Voice and Vision in Acts', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38, no. 4 (1 June 2016): 456-81; R. Alan Culpepper, 'Seeing the Kingdom of God: The Metaphor of Sight in the Gospel of Luke', *Currents in Theology and Mission* 21, no. 6 (November 1994): 434-43; Chad Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts: The Use of Physical Features in Characterization* (Brill: Leiden, 2008).

Jesus' interpretation must therefore be determined by his words and deeds throughout Luke's Gospel; the fourth is that as Luke's narrative is examined, the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed of Isaiah 61:1-2, appear to function as character types for all those in need of God's gracious salvation, especially those considered outcast or marginalised. The fifth, and final point, is that this message is described under the broader rubric of the kingdom of God (4:43-44) and later as the 'word of God' (5:1, 8:11,21, 11 :28).

## Response

In this second section we will investigate what type of response Jesus' message of the kingdom of God demanded from his hearers. It will be argued that his proclamation, like John the Baptist's before him, demanded repentance from the people, which was to be evidenced by a transformed lifestyle in accordance with God's purposes. As mentioned in the introduction, due to space restrictions this section will only investigate those passages that specifically mention 'repentance',<sup>242</sup> whilst also acknowledging that an investigation of this theme cannot be reduced to mere terminology.<sup>243</sup>

## Luke 5

The first text we will examine follows shortly after Jesus' sermon at Nazareth when he encounters a toll collector named Levi and invites him into discipleship by the simple summons 'follow me' (Luke 5:27-32).<sup>244</sup> Luke then tells us that Levi 'got up, left everything, and followed him' (5:28). The words 'left everything' (*aphentes panta*) are a

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<sup>242</sup> The main terms for repent/repentance are found in the verb form '*metanoēō*' and the noun form '*metanoia*'. '*Metanoēō*' is found in Luke 10:13, 11:32, 13:3,5, 15:7,10, 16:30, 17:3,4, whilst '*metanoia*' is found in 3:3,8, 5:32, 15:7, 24:47). The only occurrences of these terms that are not examined are those in 17:3,4 due to the focus on communal relationships, and 16:30 where repentance is mentioned but is not a primary focus of the text. The other term that could be examined is '*epistrephō*' that is most often translated as 'turn', but the only places that this is associated with repentance is in describing John the Baptist's ministry (1:16,17) or interpersonal relationships (17:4,31) and is not therefore considered here.

<sup>243</sup> N.T Wright and Bruce Chilton both critique E.P. Sanders for limiting repentance to terminology and minimising relevant material without good cause. See Wright, *Victory*, 254; Bruce D Chilton, 'Jesus and the Repentance of E P Sanders', *Tyndale Bulletin* 39 (1988): 3–4; E. P Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 174–211. For a broader understanding of repentance that includes themes such as the welcome of sinners, the call to realign one's beliefs, aims and actions, the offer and requirement of a new heart, and the call to pick up one's cross and follow Jesus, as alternative examples of repentance, see Tobias Hägerland, 'Jesus and the Rites of Repentance', *New Testament Studies* 52, no. 2 (April 2006): 169; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 254.

<sup>244</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 247.

Lukan addition<sup>245</sup> and whilst they may be hyperbolic,<sup>246</sup> we know from John's earlier instructions to the toll collectors that repentance meant a radical break with past oppressive practices. Therefore, Nave is probably correct to suggest that the 'willingness to leave "everything" and to follow Jesus in a new way of living that Jesus will prescribe...serves as a paradigm for repentance'.<sup>247</sup>

In accepting a subsequent banquet invitation from Levi, the Pharisees and scribes confront Jesus with the question 'why do you eat and drink with toll collectors and sinners'? In response to their question Jesus utilises a medical metaphor to justify his actions by stating that the toll collectors and other such people are sick with sin, and that he, the physician, must therefore cure their illness by fellowshiping with them.<sup>248</sup> He continues to explain himself by declaring that he has come 'to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance' (5:32). What is crucial to recognise here, as Scot McKnight highlights, is that Jesus 'had a different *ordo salutis*' to other movements of his day, so that Jesus' 'fellowship leads to both repentance and holiness' and not vice-versa.<sup>249</sup>

## Luke 10

Later in the narrative, within the context of the mission of the seventy disciples to preach the kingdom of God, Jesus speaks words of warning to those towns and cities that reject his message and messengers (10:1-16). In a series of 'prophetic reversals',<sup>250</sup> Jesus begins with a chilling pronouncement that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgement<sup>251</sup> for Sodom than for any town that does not welcome the message of the kingdom (10:10-12). The reason that this is such a terrifying statement is that

<sup>245</sup> Mark and Matthew only state that Peter, James, John and Levi (Matt. 9:9 Matthew) followed Jesus whereas Luke adds, in both accounts, that they 'left everything' and followed him (Mark 1:17, 2:14; Matt. 4:20, 9:9; Luke 5:11,28). This redaction is significant for Luke alone has Jesus also ask the rich young man to sell 'all' (pas) that he owns (18:22). A possible anomaly is that Luke omits this phrase of his account of Peter's question to Jesus regarding the disciples renunciation of goods in 18:22 but for a possible answer to this, see Esler, *[Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts]*, 167.

<sup>246</sup> Christopher M. Hays argues that Luke's use of 'everything' (*panta*) is hyperbolic and means, at this point in the narrative, no more than they left their source of income. For synoptic support of this hyperbolic use he cites Matt 3.5; 4.24; 21.26; 23.5; Mark 1.5, 37; 7.3; Luke 5.17; 20.45; 21.17, 38; 22.70; Acts 1.1, 19; 9.35; 18.17; 19.10, 17; 21.28; 26.4. Christopher M. Hays, *Luke's wealth ethics: a study in their coherence and character* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 82–83.

<sup>247</sup> Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 168.

<sup>248</sup> Johnson highlights the use of this metaphor in Hellenistic moral teaching. See Dio Chrysostom, *Ad Alexandrinos* 32:14–30; Epictetus, *Diatribai* 3:23,30. Johnson and Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 97.

<sup>249</sup> Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 49.

<sup>250</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1003.

<sup>251</sup> That the term 'on that day' (*en ekeine te hēmera*) describes the eschatological day of judgement is clear from the parallel term 'at the judgement' (*en tēkrisei*) in 10:14.

throughout the biblical narrative, the name ‘Sodom’ had become a proverbial term for sin in the Old Testament,<sup>252</sup> and especially the sin of inhospitality (Gen 19:1-23).<sup>253</sup> Thus Jesus is comparing the rejection of his disciples with the infamous attitudes and practices of this renowned den of iniquity. Jesus then continues, in language reminiscent of Old Testament prophetic denunciations,<sup>254</sup> to pronounce judgment upon the specific cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida for their refusal to repent despite witnessing miracles (10:13). He now states that even the notoriously wicked pagan cities of Tyre and Sidon<sup>255</sup> would have repented in sackcloth and ashes if they had witnessed the things that these present cities had (10:13-14). Capernaum likewise does not fare much better (10:15, cf. Isa. 14:13-15). Thus, Jesus condemns, in the strongest possible terms, those towns and cities that refused to repent and turn back to God despite both hearing about, and witnessing first-hand, the kingdom of God.

## Luke 11

Moments later Luke tells us that there were some, who ‘testing [Jesus], sought from Him a sign from heaven’ (11:16), and to whom Jesus counters by stating that none will be given to them except the cryptic ‘sign of Jonah’ (11:29). It has been suggested that the ‘sign of Jonah’ should be understood as referring to Jesus’ resurrection,<sup>256</sup> but both the immediate context and structure of the text suggests that it should be interpreted as Jesus’ preaching of the word of God. With regards to the immediate context, the saying is preceded by Jesus promising blessing to those who ‘hear the word of God and keep it’, which frames that which follows in terms of proclamation and response. With regard to the structure, Jesus, after stating that he would be a sign to his generation as Jonah was to the Ninevites, describes his relationship with his contemporaries with two almost identical sets of contrasts: the first contrast features the queen of the South who will

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<sup>252</sup> For ‘Sodom’ as proverbial for sin see Gen 13:13; Isa 3:9; Ezek 16:48, 56, and as warning to others see Deut. 29:23; Isa 1:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6 in the Old Testament and Jude 7; 2 Pet 2:6; Rom 9:29. Johnson and Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 168.

<sup>253</sup> Joel Green notes that some Jewish texts do focus on sexual immorality as the predominant sin (e.g. Jub. 16:5-6, 20:5; Jude 7), but the predominant interpretative focus was on the inhospitality (Jos. Ant. 1.11.1 §§194-195; Ezek 16:48; Wis. 19:13-15). Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 415-16.

<sup>254</sup> See Amos 6:4-7; Mic. 2:1; Hab. 2:6-7; and Zeph. 2:5 for comparisons with this text. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: 10-24*, vol. 2, Anchor Bible (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1985), 851.

<sup>255</sup> Stein argues that these two cities ‘represented the pagan world’. Stein, *Luke*, 307. For Tyre and Sidon in the Old Testament see Isa. 23; Jer. 25:22; 47:4; Ezek. 26:1-28:24; Joel 3:4-8; Amos 1:9-10. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1003.

<sup>256</sup> As it clearly is in Matt. 12:38-42. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 485; Stein, *Luke*, 335.

condemn 'this generation' at the day of judgement because she came 'from the ends of the earth' to listen to Solomon's wisdom, but now that something greater than Solomon is here, the people refuse to listen to him (11:31); in the second contrast the people of Nineveh will condemn the people of Israel for they 'repented at the proclamation of Jonah', but now something greater than Jonah is here and the people refuse to repent at his message (11:32).

The focus on the queen of the South being willing to listen to the teaching of Solomon, and the people of Nineveh being willing to listen to and repent at the message of Jonah, suggest that the focus of this passage should be on themes of 'messenger', 'message' and 'response'. When this is placed alongside Jesus' earlier blessing on those who hear the word of God and obey it, it strongly suggests that the sign of Jonah should be understood in reference to Jesus and his proclamation. The queen of the south and the people of Nineveh recognised the truth of what Solomon and Jonah were speaking and responded appropriately, but now a sage greater than Solomon, and a prophet greater than Jonah is present and the people refuse to repent and acknowledge it.

### Luke 13

In Luke 13, immediately following Jesus' repeated call for his contemporaries to repent in order to avoid destruction (13:3,5), Jesus tells the parable of a fruitless fig tree (13:6-9). In this story, a man who owned a vineyard came looking for fruit from a particular fig tree for three years and did not find any on each of his visits. In light of this unfruitfulness, he commands his gardener to cut it down and get rid of it. The gardener pleads with the owner to give it one more year, in which time he will care for it, but that if it still does not bear fruit then he shall have it removed (13:6-9).

The language of 'repentance' and the imagery of the removal of an unfruitful tree as an act of God's judgement reminds the reader of John the Baptist's earlier warnings in Luke 3:7-9. There, John had warned the people not to rely on their biological relationship to Abraham but to bear fruits worthy of repentance, and that every tree that failed to do so would be cut down and thrown into the fire. Jesus likewise calls his contemporaries to repentance and warns them that their present unfruitfulness will ultimately lead to their destruction (13:9). However, he also appears to teach that the people were being given a short period of time to repent and change their ways that they might avoid such

tragedy.<sup>257</sup> Miller notes that the type of fruit that Jesus appears to expect from the people is outlined in his sermon on the plain, and like John's earlier exhortations, issues of mercy, generosity and justice are central.<sup>258</sup>

## Luke 15

The last section we will look at here is Jesus' parabolic teaching in Luke 15 where once again Jesus is being upbraided by the Pharisees and scribes for welcoming sinners and eating with them (15:1-2). It is in response to this charge that Jesus tells three parables. Green notes that 'all three [parables] share a common progression, moving from what a main character "has" to its loss, recovery and restoration, and the celebration that ensues'.<sup>259</sup> But, as Johnson notes, it is particularly the first two that 'form a perfectly matched pair',<sup>260</sup> as demonstrated in their almost identical structure, and in the repetition of key phrases and themes.<sup>261</sup> In both parables a main character (man v.4, woman v.8) loses something of value (sheep v.4, coin v.8), searches for, and finds, that which was lost (v.4-5, v.8-9), and calls for friends and neighbours to rejoice in their success (v.6, v.9). The conclusions to each parable are also almost identical in their narration, as they both describe the heavenly rejoicing that takes place over the repentance of one sinner (15:7,10).<sup>262</sup>

The third and final parable, which has traditionally been called 'the parable of the prodigal son', begins by introducing three main characters with the statement 'there was a man who had two sons' (15:11). Whilst the structure of this parable differs from that of the first two, many of the basic elements of the story, such as loss, recovery, rejoicing, and repentance, are retained. The younger son is twice described as lost and

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<sup>257</sup> Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 244; Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1210; Stein, *Luke*, 369; Fitzmyer, *Gospel According to St. Luke*, 2:1005; Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 75; Allison Jr, 'Jesus and the Covenant', 72.

<sup>258</sup> Amanda Miller notes the repeated use of the verb '*poieō*' and its cognates (bear/make/produce - 6:23,26,27,31,33,35,43,36,37,49; cf. 8:21) in this sermon and how it ends with the teaching concerning the good and bad trees (6:43-44). Miller, 'Good Sinners and Exemplary Heretics', 464.

<sup>259</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 568-69.

<sup>260</sup> Johnson and Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 240.

<sup>261</sup> For very similar conclusions regarding these two parables see Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 571-72; Charles Homer Giblin, 'Structural and Theological Considerations on Luke 15', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (January 1962): 19; Ernst R. Wendland, 'Finding Some Lost Aspects of Meaning in Christ's Parables of the Lost--and Found (Luke 15)', *Trinity Journal* 17, no. 1 (1996): 24.

<sup>262</sup> Charles Giblin thus suggests that 'the principal point of the illustration is [the] joy shared in heaven on one sinner's change of heart'. Giblin, 'Structural and Theological Considerations on Luke 15', 19.



found (15:24,32), the Father rejoices abundantly over the return of his son (15:22-24,32), and whilst the specific term for repentance (*metanoia*) is not found here, it is certainly implied (15:17-20a).<sup>263</sup> The genius of this parable can be viewed when a representative role is ascribed to each of the characters: the man is understood in relation to Jesus/God; the younger son to the 'toll collectors and sinners'; and the elder son to the 'Pharisees and scribes'.<sup>264</sup> This text once again challenges the Pharisees to embrace God's kingdom by embracing the repentant sinner and outcast,<sup>265</sup> and warns that failure to do so will only further solidify the reversal that is taking place where the outsider becomes an insider, and the insider an outsider.<sup>266</sup>

### Summary

The response that Jesus' message demanded of its listeners was one of repentance, which as was argued earlier, meant a complete reorientation of one's life toward the will of God. He appealed to the message and demonstration of the kingdom of God as the grounds of this urgent claim upon the people and warned them that they were currently enjoying a short period of grace within which they were expected to bear the fruits worthy of repentance. Those who refused remained under judgement, whilst those who accepted such terms were assured of salvation.

### Community

For this section on community, the parable of the Great Banquet was chosen precisely because it represents in parabolic form the group that developed in response to Jesus' proclamation and call for repentance.

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<sup>263</sup> Ramsey suggests that there is an element of ambiguity in the text regarding the integrity of the younger son's repentance but also notes that the context of the emphasis in the previous parables on repentance certainly suggests that this might be the case. George W Ramsey, 'Plots, Gaps, Repetitions, and Ambiguity in Luke 15', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 17, no. 1 (1990): 37-41. For others who understand the younger son as repentant see Erich H. Kiehl, "'The Lost' Parables in Luke's Gospel Account', *Concordia Journal* 18, no. 3 (July 1992): 257; J Bradley Chance, 'Luke 15: Seeking the Outsiders', *Review & Expositor* 94, no. 2 (1997): 252-53; Frank D. Macchia, 'Towards Individual and Communal Renewal: Reflections on Luke's Theology of Conversion', *Ex Auditu* 25 (2009): 96-97.

<sup>264</sup> Blomberg notes that reading the three characters in reference to Jesus/God, the sinners, and the Pharisees helps to interpret the parable in that 'each main point lines up behind one of the three main characters'. Craig L. Blomberg, 'Interpreting the Parables of Jesus: Where Are We and Where Do We Go from Here?', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (January 1991): 53-54. See also Robert H. Stein, 'Interpreting the Parables of Luke', *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 40, no. 1 (September 1997): 10.

<sup>265</sup> For wider context of table-fellowship and hospitality see 14:13,21 and 16:20. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 568-69.

<sup>266</sup> Chance, 'Luke 15', 249.

The parable itself is found in Luke 14:16-24 and is linked structurally, thematically and linguistically with Jesus' healing of a man with dropsy (14:1-6), and his instructions for both guests (14:7-11) and hosts (14:12-14) regarding table fellowship.<sup>267</sup> In his instructions to the guests concerning participation in a banquet, Jesus advises them to take the position of humility because 'everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted' (14:7-11 ESV). This counsel once again reflects the Lukan idea of divine reversal<sup>268</sup> and carries an eschatological edge in that the verbs of humbling and exalting in 14:11 are described using the divine future passive. This suggests that whilst God has undoubtedly begun the process of turning the world upside-down, there is still a future vindication and reordering of social status and honour to come.<sup>269</sup>

Following his advice to the guests, Jesus now turns his attention to the host and urges him not to invite those that might repay him in kind, but instead to invite those who would be unable to return the favour, that he might then be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (14:12-14, cf. 2 Macc. 7:9; Lk. 20:35; Jn. 5:29). Story interprets this as 'Jesus subvert[ing] the common balanced reciprocity in favour of a generalised reciprocity'.<sup>270</sup> He argues that Jesus 'insures that the "broken victims" are made members of the community [and] outsiders become insiders'.<sup>271</sup> Jesus urges his host to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind into his home for fellowship and by doing so he will be repaid not in this age, but at the resurrection by God.<sup>272</sup> Once more it is clear that it is eschatology that is shaping ethics, for Jesus promises that how the people behave in the present will be reflected in their ultimate state before God.

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<sup>267</sup> Story observes the shared place, setting and time, the related and interchangeable terms such as 'to eat bread' (*phagein arton*), 'banquet' (*gamos*), 'luncheon' (*ariston*), 'reception' (*doche*), 'shall eat bread' (*phagetai arton*), 'dinner' (*deipnon*). There is also an interchange between hosts and guests in all four sections, the repetition of the key verb 'invite' (*kaleō*), the repetition of the fourfold group of needy persons and similarities in structure between sections. Lyle Story, 'One Banquet with Many Courses (Luke 14:1-24)', *Journal of Biblical & Pneumatological Research* 4 (Fall 2012): 75-77.

<sup>268</sup> See Luke 1:48, 52; 3:5; 10:15; 14:11; 18:14; Acts 2:33; 5:31 (cf. Matt. 18:4, 23:12; Jas. 4:6, 10:1; 1 Pet. 5:6). Johnson and Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 224.

<sup>269</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: Chapters 10-24* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1045.

<sup>270</sup> Story, 'One Banquet with Many Courses (Luke 14', 86.

<sup>271</sup> Story, 86.

<sup>272</sup> Again note the theological passive here that suggests that it will be God that rewards those who order their lives in this way. Johnson and Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 1048.

All this talk of eschatology and feasting provokes one of those listening to evoke the hope of the messianic feast by blurting out 'blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God' (14:15).<sup>273</sup> It is in response to this proclamation that Jesus gives the parable of the Great Banquet. It is worth noting again here that the beatitude pronounced, and Jesus' response, are both fundamentally concerned with who will, and who will not, participate in the kingdom of God: they function as something of an answer to the earlier discussion regarding who will be saved (13:22-30).

The parable itself concerns a certain someone who invited many people to a great banquet, only to have them reject the invitation, before he then sends further invitations to the outcast and marginalised in order that the banquet may proceed (14:16-24). Due to the eschatological context of the parable, specifically the messianic banquet, it appears that the host in the story could represent either God or Jesus,<sup>274</sup> but should probably be understood in relation to Jesus.<sup>275</sup> However, regardless of whether the host is God or Jesus, the message given to those invited to 'come for everything is ready now' (14:17), presses home the importance of the present moment. This transition in emphasis from the future to the immediate is an important one to acknowledge. As Paul Ballard rightly notes 'Jesus seems to have laid great emphasis in word and action on table fellowship as demonstrating the already present eschatological activity of God'.<sup>276</sup>

What is also noteworthy, is that it was customary when hosting a meal to send out two invites. The initial one, seen in 14:16, allows the guests to weigh up whether this is an invitation that is socially permissible and personally beneficial, and also informs the host of how much preparation will be needed.<sup>277</sup> The second invite, found in 14:17, is the one that informs those coming that the banquet is now ready to attend. At this point

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<sup>273</sup> See Isaiah 25:6-9; 2 Esd 2:38; 1 Enoch 60:7, 62:14; IQSa 2:11-23; Midr. Gen. 62:2; b.Sanhédrin 153a. Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia, 1981), 86.

<sup>274</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 315.

<sup>275</sup> In the final line of the parable the discourse of the host changes from a third person perspective to a first-person perspective, which appears to infuse Jesus' words with those of the host. The subject of the address also moves from the singular servant to a plural 'you', which suggests that Jesus is now addressing his hearers outside the parable (Luke 11:8; 15:7,10; 16:9; 18:8,14; 19:26). Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1273. Contra Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 562 n.164.

<sup>276</sup> Paul H. Ballard, 'Reasons for Refusing the Great Supper', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 23, no. 2 (October 1972): 347. See also McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel*, 47-48.

<sup>277</sup> See Lam. Rab. 4:2 for an illustration of this principle and also Esth. 5:8, 6:14; Philo *Opif.* 78. Richard L. Rohrbaugh, 'The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts', in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 141. See also Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 2008), 313-14.

in the parable, there would be great social expectation that those who said they would be present would do so and the host's reputation and honour would be at stake if they reneged on their promise.<sup>278</sup>

This is in fact what happens, and whilst we are given three examples of the excuses given, the text says that 'they all alike began to make excuses' (14:18-20). Bailey suggests that the refusal to come to the banquet was an intentional act to try and 'humiliate the host and prevent the banquet from taking place'.<sup>279</sup> The reason that Bailey is so strong in his assessment is because he sees the excuses as weak, and 'an implausible excuse is a deliberate public insult'.<sup>280</sup> One cannot come because he has just bought a field and has to inspect it, another has bought some oxen and has gone to try them out, whilst the third simply states that he will not be coming because he has just been married!<sup>281</sup> Rohrbaugh suggests that the weakness of these excuses can be attributed to the fact that the guests are playing by the social rules of the day by masking the true reason for refusal to come with superficial and irrelevant claims.<sup>282</sup>

In light of these excuses, the host becomes angry and instructs his servant to go into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame (14:21). This is the exact same group of people that Jesus had just exhorted his listeners to invite to their banquets and as unable to repay the generosity (14:13). They are also those who have previously been described by Luke as 'the special objects of Jesus' mission (4:16-30; 7:22) and the heirs of the kingdom of God (6:20-23)'.<sup>283</sup> Thus, the parable evokes Jesus' jubilee mission and suggests that those who will participate in such festivities are precisely those identified in Isaiah 61:1-2 as the primary recipients of God's favour.

A fascinating point here is that there is a sense of progression and movement in the parable from the centre to the margins that Rohrbaugh has argued is reflective of the

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<sup>278</sup> Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 316.

<sup>279</sup> Bailey, 316.

<sup>280</sup> Bailey suggests that no-one buys a field without inspecting it or yoke of oxen without trying them, and that the last excuse is 'unspeakably offensive' and the equivalent of saying 'I have a woman in the back of the house, and I am busy with her'. Bailey, 314-15.

<sup>281</sup> Others such as Ballard understand the excuses as reflective of Deuteronomistic Law regarding exemption from war. See Ballard, 'Reasons for Refusing the Great Supper'. But for a critique of this position see Humphrey Palmer, 'Just Married, Cannot Come', *Novum Testamentum* 18, no. 4 (October 1976): 241-57.

<sup>282</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts', 143. Christopher Hays also proposes that there may be an underlying critique of preoccupation with wealth present here. Hays, *Luke's wealth ethics*, 131.

<sup>283</sup> Hays, *Luke's wealth ethics*, 132.

pre-industrial city of the first century.<sup>284</sup> He proposes that these cities were walled enclosures with further delineations inside that separated the elites in the centre from the non-elites in the outer areas. The host has instructed the servant to go out into the realm of these non-elites in order to invite them in.<sup>285</sup> This group of newly invited guests is also comparable to other groups who were explicitly denied full participation in the Temple worship (Lev. 21:17-23),<sup>286</sup> as well as those barred by the community at Qumran from their eschatological banquet (1QS<sup>a</sup> 2.5-9, cf. 1QM 7.4-5).<sup>287</sup> The sense of contrast with our parable could not be greater for Jesus has specifically declared that heavenly reward belongs to those who include, rather than exclude, such persons. Green has argued that in inviting these people to his banquet, the host has subverted and abandoned the cultural norms of the day and initiated 'a new community grounded in gracious and uncalculating hospitality'.<sup>288</sup>

After the servant has obeyed the master's command and brought in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame, he returns to his master and tells him that 'there is still room' (14:22).<sup>289</sup> In response to this the master tells the slave to 'go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that [his] house may be filled' (14:23). The geographic movement away from the centre, begun with the first invite, continues here as the servant is now sent to 'the roads and lanes' (*tas hodous kai phragmous*) to 'compel people to come in'. The terms 'roads and lanes' describe the area outside of the city walls that was 'inhabited by both outcasts and those requiring access to the city but not permitted to live within it'.<sup>290</sup> These are the people who were considered more socially marginalised and excluded than the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame that had previously been invited. The host has sent his servant even further afield both geographically and socially in order to find people to bring to the feast.

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<sup>284</sup> s Rohrbaugh, 'The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts'.

<sup>285</sup> He suggests that the term '*plateias*', translated as 'streets' refers to the place of normal interaction between elites and non-elites but that the other term '*rhymas*', translated as 'lanes', should be understood as the alleyways where the poorest of these non-elites lived. He therefore proposes that 'the host has gone far beyond the normal mode of communication in seeking out guests totally unlike those first invited'. Rohrbaugh, 143.

<sup>286</sup> Johnson and Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 1047-48.

<sup>287</sup> Sanders also notes relevant Pharisaic oral law in m.*Hagigah* II 7, m. *Abot* II 6, m. *Bekorot* VII, m. *Tohorot* VII; but cf. also m. *Abot* I 5., James A. Sanders, 'Banquet of the Dispossessed', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 20, no. 4 (May 1965): 360-61.

<sup>288</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 562-63.

<sup>289</sup> Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 338.

<sup>290</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts', 144.

There are some who have interpreted these invitations allegorically, so that the first invite relates to the religious elite of Israel, the second to the outcasts of Israel, and the third and final invite being that to the Gentiles.<sup>291</sup> This becomes problematic however, when you begin to ask why the pious in Israel are said to have received the first invite. If any group within Israel were said to have been given priority, would it not be the poor, the blind and the outcast who only get the second invite? If taken further, it becomes even more troublesome that the host becomes interested in these groups only after, and apparently in spite of, the initial rejection from the elites. It is as if the poor and the outcast are an afterthought and not a priority to Jesus.<sup>292</sup> In response Snodgrass helpfully suggests that ‘a parable is a partial picture of reality ... [and that] parables must be allowed to mirror the portion of reality they wish and not forced to picture a systematic theology or a chronology *in toto*’.<sup>293</sup> When Snodgrass’ advice is applied here, the parable may not need to suggest anything more than that there are some who were invited to the feast and who will miss out, whilst there are other unexpected guests who will participate.

The parable ends with the ominous warning that ‘none of those invited will taste my dinner’. This statement appears to function as both a contrast and *inclusio* with the opening verse of the parable, for in 14:16 Jesus states ‘someone gave a great banquet and invited many’ and in 14:24 that ‘none of those were invited will taste my dinner’. The contrast becomes clear when the key terms are placed side by side.<sup>294</sup>

14:16	14:24
someone ( <i>anthrōpos</i> )	my ( <i>egō</i> )
great dinner ( <i>mega deipnon</i> )	dinner ( <i>deipnon</i> )
invited ( <i>kaleō</i> )	invited ( <i>kaleō</i> )
many ( <i>polys</i> )	none ( <i>oudeis</i> )

<sup>291</sup> For something along these lines see Fitzmyer, *Gospel According to St. Luke*, 2:1053; Stein, *Luke*, 392; Roger W. Sullivan, ‘The Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24)’, *The Theological Educator* 56 (September 1997): 65; Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 309–20; Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1277.

<sup>292</sup> This appears to be position that Sullivan takes when he writes that ‘the emphasis of the parable is clear—once the offer to participate in the kingdom of God was refused by the religious elite, it was presented to the common people of Israel’. Sullivan, ‘The Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14’, 65.

<sup>293</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 315. See also Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 587.

<sup>294</sup> Scott sees an *inclusio* between 14:15 and 14:24 so as to highlight the meal as the Messianic Banquet but the links between 14:16 and 14:24 are much stronger. See Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 165.

This apparently intentional contrast between the opening and ending clause suggests that the primary intention of the parable is to address the matter of the rejection of the invitation to the feast. It is clear however, that this is not the only teaching point in the parable for the secondary invites given to social outcasts and vagabonds highlights the gracious welcome of Jesus toward such people.

### Summary

This parable then, situated as it is within the context of table fellowship with Pharisees, and amid questions regarding how many will be saved (13:23), or who will participate in the messianic feast (14:15), serves both to challenge and assure. The Pharisees are challenged and warned of their possible expulsion from the messianic feast due to their refusal to accept Jesus' message of invitation, whilst the outcast and the marginalised are assured of their welcome and place at God's table. If the invitations to the feast in this parable are symbolic of Jesus' proclamation of the time of God's favour and his summons to repentance, then the refusal of some to attend and the acceptance by others is telling. The fracturing within the people of God begun by the preaching of John the Baptist (7:29-30), continues in Jesus' ministry (3:17, 12:49-53) and suggests that the community developing around Jesus is constituted by precisely the type of people that he identified in his Nazareth sermon as those to whom the good news was especially directed. Therefore, the nature of the community gathered around Jesus reflects, and is indeed grounded by, the gracious nature of the eschatological message of jubilee that Jesus himself proclaimed.

### Parable of the Sower

In concluding this chapter on Jesus, we will briefly explore the text of Luke 8:1-21, which contains the parable of the sower that focuses on the preaching of the word of God and the mixed responses to it (8:4-15), and which itself is bracketed on either side by the theme of community (8:1-3, 19-21).

In the first section on community, Luke begins a new section in his work which is evident by his use of a summary passage that describes Jesus as going 'through cities and villages proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God' (8:1). This statement is a direct fulfilment of Jesus' earlier articulation of his desire to 'proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also' (4:43-44). Faithfulness to this

vocation had resulted in a community being formed around Jesus, with Luke mentioning three groups: the twelve, some women, and many others (8:1-3). The mention of the Twelve is significant, for their calling in 6:12-16 represented the restoration of the people of God, and thus they stand as the nucleus and leadership of this newly formed community.<sup>295</sup> The various women that Luke mentions are also important, for whilst the role and representation of women in Luke's work is debated,<sup>296</sup> the mention of some here who had been healed and delivered clearly points to them as recipients of Jesus' liberating ministry. They are, as Witherington puts it, 'living embodiments of what happens when the sower sows his seed in soil that can receive and nurture it'.<sup>297</sup> Their portrayal as those who provided for others out of their resources recalls the kind of socio-economic fruits that John the Baptist had deemed worthy of repentance (Luke 3:10-14), and thus further supports their depiction as faithful and responsive disciples.<sup>298</sup> The 'many others' (*pollai heterai*) spoken of here, simply demonstrates that Jesus' community consisted of more than those specifically mentioned and points to the fruitful nature of his proclamation and demonstration of the kingdom.

Here in this summary passage then we find that Luke has condensed much of what is significant for him throughout his two-volume work. We have an emphasis on the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom of God, witness to the power of the kingdom in the deliverance from demonic oppression, a community gathered around Jesus, the importance of the Twelve and the women, the welcome of the outcast and an example of the proper use of material possessions.<sup>299</sup> Thus at the beginning of this section we are

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<sup>295</sup> Evans, *Saint Luke*, 319; François Bovon, *Luke 1*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. Christine M Thomas (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 210; Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 33–34.

<sup>296</sup> See Robert J. Karris, 'Women and Discipleship in Luke', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (January 1994): 1–20; Robert J. Karris, 'Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, no. 3 (1998): 539; Ben Witherington III, 'On the Road with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and Other Disciples: Luke 8:1-3', *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* 70, no. 3–4 (1979): 243–48; Barbara E. Reid, 'The Gospel of Luke: Friend or Foe of Women Proclaimers of the Word?', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (January 2016): 1–23; David C. Sim, 'The Women Followers of Jesus: The Implications of Luke 8:1-3', *Heythrop Journal* 30, no. 1 (January 1989): 51–62; Kimberly Penner, 'The Work of Wealthy Women: Female Discipleship in Luke 8: 1-3' (Waterloo and Conrad Grebel University College, 2011).

<sup>297</sup> Witherington III, 'On the Road with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and Other Disciples', 243.

<sup>298</sup> Joel Green suggests that the portrayal of the women here is that they are 'persons who mirror the graciousness of Jesus' own benefaction...who like Jesus, "serve" others... and [are] exemplars of Jesus' message on faith and wealth'. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 318.

<sup>299</sup> For a similar list see Stein, *Luke*, 241.



presented with an example, *in nuce*, of Jesus' itinerant ministry and those who have responded positively. This then acts as an introduction to the parable.

In the parable itself, Jesus describes a sower who went out to sow his seed and how the seed fell within three negative environments and one positive one: The three negative areas are the path where the birds came and ate the seed (8:5); the rock where the seed could not grow due to lack of moisture (8:6); and the thorny ground that choked the seed before it could mature (8:7). The final area mentioned is the good soil, which allowed the seed to grow and produce a harvest (8:8). Jesus concludes the parable by summoning people to pay attention to how they listen (8:8b).

The call to listen carefully is important, for in-between his giving of the parable and the interpretation, Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 that suggests his 'parables serve as a rhetorical device that simultaneously conceals and reveals truth even as they expose the heart attitudes of their hearers'.<sup>300</sup> There are some who though they see and hear, will still fail to perceive or understand.

In his opening line of interpretation, Jesus explicitly identifies the seed as the word of God (8:11). Given that Luke had earlier added the term 'his seed' to the parable,<sup>301</sup> has set it within the framework of Jesus preaching the word of God (8:1, cf. 5:1), and will shortly define his family as those who hear and obey the word of God (8:21),<sup>302</sup> it appears that this is the focus and context within which, the parable should be understood. The seed that fell alongside the path, was trampled on and eaten up by the birds of the air, Jesus interprets as representative of those who hear the word of God but who have it stolen away by the devil (8:12). Of interest here is Luke's insertion<sup>303</sup> of

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<sup>300</sup> David V. Urban, 'Obscurity and Intention in Mark 4:11-12: Jesus' Parabolic Purposes', *Calvin Theological Journal* 49, no. 1 (April 2014): 124. Here I am closer to the conclusions of those who understand God confirming the people in the choice to harden their own hearts. See Geoffrey D. Robinson, 'The Motif of Deafness and Blindness in Isaiah 6:9-10: A Contextual, Literary, and Theological Analysis', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8 (1998): 167-86; Gary V. Smith, 'Spiritual Blindness, Deafness, and Fatness in Isaiah', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170, no. 678 (April 2013): 166-78.

<sup>301</sup> Neither Mark or Matthew use the word 'seed' (*sporos*) in their accounts. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 150.

<sup>302</sup> Luke changes Mark's 'do the will of God' (Mark 3:35) to 'hear and do the word of God' (Luke 8:21). I. Howard Marshall, 'Tradition and Theology in Luke (Luke 8:5-15)', *Tyndale Bulletin* 20 (1969): 64.

<sup>303</sup> Neither Mark (4:15) or Matthew (13:19) mention the result of the word being taken away from the hearts of the people. For a discussion of such matters see Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 149-55.

the phrase ‘in order that they might not believe and be saved’, for the relationship between faith and salvation is an important one throughout his narrative.<sup>304</sup>

The seed that landed on the rock, Jesus says, are those who initially receive the word of God with joy and believe for a while but fall away in a time of testing due to their lack of roots (8:13). In using the term ‘receive’ (*dechomai*) to describe the response of this particular group to the word of God, Luke uses a term that he utilises elsewhere to indicate a positive response to such preaching.<sup>305</sup> The importance of faith is further highlighted here by the description of the people ‘believing’ (*pisteuō*) only for a while before being ‘falling away’ (*aphistēmi*) in a ‘time of testing’ (*kairo periasmou*). This is language which appears to reflect New Testament language for apostasy.<sup>306</sup>

The third group to be addressed are those who are entangled among the thorns and who hear the word but are choked to the point of unfruitfulness. These people, as with the first two examples, hear the word of God and begin a journey of faith but are consequently choked (*sympnigō*) by three particular threats: the cares (*merimna*),<sup>307</sup> the riches (*ploutos*),<sup>308</sup> and the pleasures (*hēdonē*) of life. Dangers which Jesus warns about elsewhere.<sup>309</sup> Those who may initially respond positively are then strangled by lesser priorities to the point where their journey towards maturity and fruitfulness is cut tragically short.

In contrast to the three previous examples, Jesus ends the parable with an exemplary model of people who hear the word, hold it fast in a good and honest heart and bear fruit with patient endurance. The emphasis here on endurance (*hypomonē*)<sup>310</sup> stands in dramatic juxtaposition to the previous two groups who fell away (8:13,14),<sup>311</sup> whilst,

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<sup>304</sup> See Luke 7:50; 8:12, 48, 50; 17:19; 18:42; Acts 14:9; 15:11; 16:31. See also Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 1:21; Eph 2:8; Jas 2:14.

<sup>305</sup> It is used to describe response to God’s messengers (Luke 9:48[x4], 53, 10:8, 10), to the kingdom of God (Luke 18:17) and to the word of God (Acts 8:14; 11:1; 17:11. Cf. 2:41; 22:18; 24:15). Bock, *Luke 1*, 735.; Stein, *Luke*, 246.; Nolland, *Luke. 1-9*, 385. See also Grundmann, *TDNT*, 2.50-54.

<sup>306</sup> See Luke 22:28 and Acts 20:19. Nolland, *Luke. 1-9*, 385–86; Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 198.

<sup>307</sup> This can be defined as ‘the excessive self-concern over one’s welfare’. Bock, *Luke 1*, 736 n.44.

<sup>308</sup> This term is found only here in Luke, the presence of similar terms such as ‘rich’ *plousios* and ‘to be rich’ *pluteō* are placed throughout (For ‘*plousios*’ see Luke 6:24, 12:16, 14:12, 16:1, 19, 21, 22, 18:23, 25, 19:2, 21:1. For ‘*pluteō*’ see Luke 1:53, 12:21). Bock, 737.

<sup>309</sup> For ‘cares’ see Luke 12:22-25, 21:34-35. For ‘riches’ see Luke 12:15, 18:18-25. For ‘pleasures’ see Luke 12:15-25, 16:19-31.

<sup>310</sup> Luke’s only other use of this term is found in Luke 21:19, which also links endurance and salvation (cf. Acts 11:23, 14:22).

<sup>311</sup> See also Luke 21:19 and Acts 11:23, 14:22 for examples of Luke’s emphasis on the need for endurance regarding salvation.

according to Weaver, the description of the heart as being ‘good (*agathos*) and honest (*kalos*) reflects ancient depictions of ‘the virtuous disposition towards divine instruction’.<sup>312</sup> The seed of the word of God (8:11) that is sown into the good soil (8:8) of the good heart (8:15) is then said to ‘bear fruit’ (*karpophoreō*), which echoes the exhortation of John the Baptist to ‘bear fruits worthy of repentance’ and once again reinforces the idea that the word of God, when responded to appropriately will be evidenced by a transformed life that reflects the Lordship of Jesus and kingdom of God (3:8-14, 6:43-49, 8:1-3, 13:1-10).

Those who do respond to Jesus’ message with faith and perseverance then find that they do not do so alone. For following the parable, Luke narrates an episode where Jesus defines his community in kinship terms as those ‘who hear the word of God and do it’ (8:19-21). Jesus’ definition of his family members in these terms<sup>313</sup> helps to define the nature of the community expressed in the opening summary (8:1-3).<sup>314</sup> It also, like John the Baptist before, continues the redefining of membership within the people of God away from biological relationships and toward faithfulness (3:8).<sup>315</sup> Alongside those explicitly mentioned in 8:13, Luke consistently portrays the outcast, sinners, and the marginalised as those who respond in faith to the word of God and therefore as fully-fledged members of Jesus’ family.<sup>316</sup> To portray these groups in kinship terms is remarkable because the ‘family constituted the primary focus of group loyalty for persons in Mediterranean antiquity’<sup>317</sup> and reflected the cultural assumption ‘that one’s personal identity was strongly embedded in the group to which one belonged’.<sup>318</sup> The word of God demanded a response from individuals but those individuals who did

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<sup>312</sup> Examples include Plato. *Phaedr.* 276B1-277A6. See also Plato. *Resp.* 490a-492a; Plato, *Lach.* 186C; Sen. *Lucil.* 38.2; Philo. *Spec. Laws* 4.75; Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.2.2, 1.2.5, 2.6.23, 3.9.5; 4.8.11; Isoc. *Panath.* 183; Arist. *Mag. mor.* 2.9.2; E.E. 8.3.5–10, 16-17; Arius Did. *Epit.* 11g; Mus. Ruf. *Frg.* 2 John B. Weaver, ‘The Noble and Good Heart: Καλοκαγαθία in Luke’s Parable of the Sower’, in *Scripture and Traditions: Essays on Early Judaism and Christianity in Honor of Carl R. Holladay* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 164–70.

<sup>313</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer thinks that the text should be understood as referring not to those who are obedient to the word of God as being part of Jesus’ family, but rather as Jesus’ family being examples of faithful obedience. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 723. But for a convincing refutation of his position see Bock, *Luke 1*, 748; Stein, *Luke*, 251.

<sup>314</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 328.

<sup>315</sup> Green, 330.

<sup>316</sup> Mallen notes that Luke describes the poor (e.g. 14.13-14), the sick (e.g. 4.38-40), the demonized (4.33-36; 8.26-39), the blind (e.g. 18.35-43), lepers (e.g. 5.12-14; 17.11-19), tax collectors (e.g. 5.27-32; 19.1-10), ‘sinners’ (5:30, 7:37-39, 15, 19:7) widows (e.g. 7.11-16), women (e.g. 8.43-48; 13.10-16), children (e.g. 18.15-17) and Gentiles (e.g. 7.1-10) as all responsive to Jesus. Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts*, 107.

<sup>317</sup> Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 214.

<sup>318</sup> Hellerman, 214.

respond found themselves with a new identity and a community as members of Jesus' family, and thus part of the people of God.

## Conclusion

After examining the themes of 'message', 'response', and 'community' in relation to Jesus, I can now offer some conclusions. In the 'message' section it was argued that due to its programmatic function in the narrative, Jesus' sermon at Nazareth is the place where his proclamation and mission are most clearly articulated. His declaration of the fulfilment of Isaiah 61:1-2 evoked the hope of an eschatological jubilee that offered a holistic salvation of forgiveness, healing, and deliverance and summed up under the term 'kingdom of God'. It was argued that an examination of Luke's narrative demonstrates that whilst Jesus' message was for all Israel, the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed, mentioned in this text, stood as representative figures of those toward whom such good news was particularly needed and directed.

Regarding the theme of 'response', I suggested that Jesus' proclamation of the arrival of the kingdom of God, like John's message before him, demanded a response of repentance from the people. Jesus also aligns closely with John in that he expects the people to demonstrate the integrity of their repentance by displaying fruits worthy of such a commitment. However, Jesus differs from John in that he appears to suggest that the imminent judgement of which John warned the people was held at bay, whilst the people enjoyed a short period of grace in which the people might repent and avoid such tragedy.

The 'community' theme was explored through the lens of the parable of the Great Banquet for it highlights the nature of the community that was beginning to form in response to Jesus' proclamation. For if the call to repentance is represented by the invitations to participate in the great banquet, then the parable's identification of those who miss out and those who are welcomed in is telling. The sense of reversal and sifting that began with John, continues with Jesus as those considered 'insiders', such as the Pharisees, find themselves in danger of exclusion, whilst 'outsiders', such as the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, find a place for themselves at the table. Thus, the embryonic, but surprising and subversive identity of the people of God begins to take greater shape.

The parable of the Sower and its surrounding context were also included here for it encapsulates much of the material on 'message', 'response', and 'community' already discussed. The parable itself interprets Jesus' preaching of the word of God and the differing responses that it evinces in the lives of the hearers. It proposes that the correct response is one that doesn't just hear the message, but retains it, and through perseverance allows it to produce fruit in the life of the hearer. Whilst there is an emphasis within the parable on the responsibility of the individual to steward the word of God within their own heart, the fact that it is bracketed by the theme of community serves to highlight the fact that those who do respond appropriately find themselves incorporated into the true people of God.

So, in concluding this second chapter, it should be noted that there are many similarities between what we have discovered about John the Baptist and Jesus: both were said to have preached the word of God (3:2 ,5:1); the message of each was interpreted through the lens of an prophetic text (Isaiah 40:3-5, 61:1-2); both demanded a response of repentance in the form of commitment to God's rule (3:3, 5:32); the preaching of both caused a division within the people of God (7:29-30, 12:49-53); and the ministry of both resulted in the formation of a community of unlikely participants (3:12-14, 14:15-24).

## Chapter Three: Early Church

### Introduction

In this third and final chapter, we will examine our three themes of ‘message’, ‘response’ and ‘community’ in relation to Luke’s presentation of the early church in Acts. Due to space restrictions we will again have to limit our scope of inquiry to that which might be considered representative of the wider material. Because, as Ferguson argues, ‘Luke puts representative or programmatic material early in his narratives that are then treated more briefly in other occurrences’,<sup>319</sup> we will examine that which appears at the outset of the narrative of Acts. Therefore, Peter’s Pentecost speech will be used for the ‘message’ section (2:14-36), his answer to the people’s question ‘what shall we do’ for the ‘response’ section (2:37-39), and the summary passages for the section on ‘community’ (2:42-47, 4:32-35).

### Message

The context of Peter’s speech in Acts 2:14-36 is the remarkable events accompanying the outpouring of the Spirit that immediately precede it in 2:1-13. Here the people are said to have been left ‘bewildered’ (*syncheō*), ‘amazed’ (*existēmī*), ‘astonished’ (*thaumazō*), and ‘perplexed’ (*diaporeō*),<sup>320</sup> and so they ask, ‘what does this mean’?<sup>321</sup> It is in response to this question of meaning that Peter stands to give his speech.

But before examining Peter’s interpretation, it was suggested in the introduction that the speech might be considered programmatic in Acts, and the following three reasons are offered in support: the first is that the speech stands as the first evangelistic message in Acts and therefore likely to be typical of what Luke<sup>322</sup> considered of primary importance;<sup>323</sup> the second is that Peter stands and speaks as the representative spokesman for the community;<sup>324</sup> and the third is that it fulfils Tannehill’s four-fold

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<sup>319</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 170.

<sup>320</sup> 1:6,7,12.

<sup>321</sup> 2:12

<sup>322</sup> I say Luke here and not Peter as Acts 2:40 makes it clear that Peter ‘testified with many other arguments’ and therefore Luke, even if retaining what Peter actually said, has been selective in his presentation.

<sup>323</sup> On this point see Thompson, ‘Reconsidering the Pentecost Materials in Acts Ecclesiologically’, 4–5; Robert C. Tannehill, ‘The Functions of Peter’s Mission Speeches in the Narrative of Acts’, *New Testament Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 1991): 400–414; Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

<sup>324</sup> Peter is said to stand alongside the other apostles here but it is only him that speaks, which suggests that ‘the speech is put on the lips of Peter but it is clearly regarded by Luke as the word of the whole community of apostles representing the Church’. O’Reilly, *Word and Sign in the Acts of the Apostles*, 63.

criteria of importance by use of an Old Testament quotation,<sup>325</sup> a divine commission,<sup>326</sup> a disclosure of God's purposes from a reliable character,<sup>327</sup> and the way the speech anticipates the subsequent narrative.<sup>328</sup> Our examination of this speech will be broken down into three sections that correspond to Peter's use of Joel 3:2-28-32, Psalm 16:8-11, and Psalm 110:1 (LXX) as these appear to thematically follow his argument.<sup>329</sup>

## Joel

In his quotation of Joel 3:2-5 Peter<sup>330</sup> makes some slight but significant adjustments to highlight and emphasise certain elements.<sup>331</sup> An important and almost immediate change regards the timing of the outpouring of the Spirit from Joel's 'afterwards' (*meta tauta*) to 'in the last days' (*en tais eschatais hēmerais*). This change serves to give the event an eschatological edge<sup>332</sup> that is suggestive of Israel's restoration,<sup>333</sup> and to also allow the prophecy to enjoy a more generalised application beyond the immediate context in Joel.<sup>334</sup> Blumhofer suggests that this change is used to describe not only *when* certain things will happen, but also *who* will get to participate in them for the only other place in the LXX where the specific words '*en tais eschatais hēmerais*' occur, is Isaiah

<sup>325</sup> Joel 2, and Psalms 16 and 110.

<sup>326</sup> See the way that Pentecost is linked to the disciples' commission in Luke 24:47-49 and Acts 1:8.

<sup>327</sup> Note the repeated use of '*apophthengomai*' in 2:4 and 2:14 that suggests that Peter's speech is Spirit-inspired. David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 139.

<sup>328</sup> For example, the promise that God would pour out his Spirit upon 'all flesh' is seen to come to fulfilment as Luke describes both Samaritans (8:15-17) and Gentiles (10:44-46) receiving this divine gift. For other repeated themes see Tannehill, 'The Functions of Peter's Mission Speeches in the Narrative of Acts', 404; Thompson, 'Reconsidering the Pentecost Materials in Acts Ecclesiologically', 4-5.

<sup>329</sup> I follow Dunn in this and use this structure as it appears to most clearly expound the logic and argument of Peter's speech. James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Epworth Commentaries (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996), 27.

<sup>330</sup> I understand the speeches in Acts as mainly historically reliable. For arguments in support of this see Conrad H. Gempf, 'Public Speaking and Published Accounts', in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke, vol. 1, 6 vols, *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 259-304; Colin J. Hemer, 'The Speeches of Acts: Pt 2: The Areopagus Address', *Tyndale Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (November 1989): 239-59; Simon Kistemaker, 'The Speeches in Acts', *Criswell Theological Review* 5 (September 1990): 31-41.

<sup>331</sup> This is no mistake on his part for Keener notes that this was an acceptable Jewish practice (1QpHab XII, 1-10; V,8-12; *Sipre Deut.* 357.5.11), and Blumhofer highlights the almost verbatim quotation of the Psalms. Keener, *Acts*, 2012, 875; C. M. Blumhofer, 'Luke's Alteration of Joel 3.1-5 in Acts 2.17-21', *New Testament Studies* 62, no. 04 (October 2016): 499-500.

<sup>332</sup> Whilst this change undoubtedly highlights the eschatological element of the quotation, Menzies notes that this does not deny Joel's perspective but simply accentuates one aspect that was already present in the original text. Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 180-81.

<sup>333</sup> See Isa. 2:2; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1; Dan. 2:28 (cf. 11Q13 II, 4; 1 En. 27:3-4; 4Q509 II, 19; 2 Bar. 76:5; Test. Zeb. 8:2, 9:5). Keener, *Acts*, 2012, 877.

<sup>334</sup> Blumhofer, 'Luke's Alteration of Joel 3.1-5 in Acts 2.17-21', 503-4.

2:2f where the nations enjoy a time of salvation and peace rather than judgement in their relation to God.<sup>335</sup>

This more inclusive perspective is then further accentuated by the fact that God says that he will pour out his Spirit upon ‘all flesh’ (*pasan sarka*). In Joel, the ‘all flesh’ should probably be read as referring only to the people of Judah,<sup>336</sup> and given Peter’s subsequent surprise at the Gentiles receiving the ‘same gift’ (11:17), this is probably how he understood the phrase too.<sup>337</sup> However, this may not exhaust the reference of meaning for the phrase echoes Luke’s earlier use of Isaiah 40:3-5 that climaxed with the universal statement that ‘all flesh (*pasan sarka*) shall see the salvation of God’ (Luke 3:4-6).<sup>338</sup> And when this is then read in light of the later outpourings on Samaritans (8:15-17) and Gentiles (10:44-48), it suggests that Luke is hinting toward a more inclusive understanding of the promise of the Spirit.

According to Joel, the immediate result of this eschatological outpouring is that ‘sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams’ (2:17). Mention of ‘prophecy’, ‘visions’, and ‘dreams’ all evoke prophetic activities in the Old Testament<sup>339</sup> and imply that the same Spirit that inspired the prophets of old will now be given to all God’s people (cf. Num. 11:29).<sup>340</sup> The prophetic purpose of the outpouring is further highlighted by the repetition of the phrase ‘and they shall prophesy’ in 2:17-18. Menzies notes that this addition serves to emphasise the prophetic nature of Pentecost and that ‘the disciples, as recipients of the gift, are not inebriated men—they are eschatological prophets proclaiming the word of

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<sup>335</sup> Blumhofer, 503–6.

<sup>336</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 136.

<sup>337</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 113; Daniel J. Treier, ‘The Fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32: A Multiple-Lens Approach’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 1 (March 1997): 19–20.

<sup>338</sup> Blumhofer, ‘Luke’s Alteration of Joel 3.1–5 in Acts 2.17–21’, 507–8.

<sup>339</sup> In the LXX ‘prophecy’ (*propheteuo*) is found 117 times with the majority of these in Jeremiah (40x) and Ezekiel (38x), ‘visions’ (*horasis*) is found 133 times with the majority in Ezekiel (34x) and Daniel (44x), whilst ‘dreams’ (*enypnion*) is there 107 times with the majority of these in Genesis (24x) and Daniel (44x).

<sup>340</sup> David Peterson notes that visions are mentioned later in the narrative (Acts 9:10,12; 10:3,17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9,10; 18:9), but dreams are not even though some visions occur at night (16:9, 18:9), or whilst in a trance (10:10, 11:5). He also notes that whilst only a few specific people are mentioned as prophets (11:27, 13:1, 15:32; 21:10), others do prophesy (19:6, 21:9) and so he suggests ‘prophesying’ appears to be a particular way of describing Spirit-directed ministry, both to believers and unbelievers’. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 142.



God'.<sup>341</sup> Peter's insertion of 'my' (*mou*) into the text so that it now reads 'even upon *my* servants, both men and women', serves not only to highlight this prophetic role<sup>342</sup> but, as Keucker and others have noted, to also demarcate who belongs within the people of God.<sup>343</sup>

In the second half of Peter's quotation from Joel, God promises to 'show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist' when 'the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day' (2:19-20).<sup>344</sup> The mention of 'wonders' (*teras*) and 'signs' (*sēmeion*) could refer to Jesus' performing of wonders and signs referenced in 2:22,<sup>345</sup> or the similarly described ministry of the apostles in 2:43 (cf. 4:30, 5:12),<sup>346</sup> Stephen in 6:8, Philip in 8:6, Paul and Barnabas in 14:3 and 15:12, and even Moses in 7:36.<sup>347</sup> It is with this last character, Moses, that these terms are most often associated in the Old Testament,<sup>348</sup> which might suggest a comparison between the salvation and deliverance associated with the Exodus and the salvation accomplished through Jesus (cf. Acts 3:22-23).<sup>349</sup> In light of these possibilities it seems reasonable to suggest that the miracles

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<sup>341</sup> Menzies notes that Luke has a 'penchant for duplicating words and phrases in quotations from the Old Testament'. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 184. For the apostolic message as the word of God later in Acts, see Acts 4:31; 6:2-7; 8:14, 11:1, 12:24, 13:5, 7, 46, 48, 16:32; 17:13; 18:11.

<sup>342</sup> See 2 Kgs. 9:7, 17:13; Jer. 7:25, 26:5, 29:19, 35:15, 44:4; Ezek. 38:17; Zech 1:6. Blumhofer, 'Luke's Alteration of Joel 3.1-5 in Acts 2.17-21', 508.

<sup>343</sup> Aaron Keucker, 'The Spirit and the "Other": Social Identity, Ethnicity and Intergroup Reconciliation in Luke-Acts' (St. Andrews, 2008), 122; Blumhofer, 'Luke's Alteration of Joel 3.1-5 in Acts 2.17-21', 508; Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 182-83. Some, such as Darrel Bock, want to retain Joel's reference to literal slaves here so that there is a socio-economic dimension to the outpouring, but whilst this does fit within Luke's concern for the poor and the marginalised, it does not seem to make best sense of the insertion. Bock, *Acts*, 115.

<sup>344</sup> Peter has added the words 'signs' (*sēmeia*), 'above' (*anō*), and 'below' (*katō*) to 2:19, which serve to give the verse a sense of rhyme and parallelism. Bock, *Acts*, 115.

<sup>345</sup> Acts 2:22 notes deeds of power (*dynamis*). Mikeal C. Parsons, 'Christian Origins and Narrative Openings: The Sense of a Beginning in Acts 1-5', *Review & Expositor* 87, no. 3 (1990): 409.

<sup>346</sup> In Acts 2:43 we are told that 'many wonders (*teras*) and signs (*sēmeion*) were being done by the apostles' and as with the reference to Jesus in 2:22 the unusual word order of 'wonders and signs' is retained here. Robert Bryan Sloan, "'Signs and Wonders": A Rhetorical Clue to the Pentecost Discourse', *Evangelical Quarterly* 63 (1991): 235.

<sup>347</sup> Parsons, 'Christian Origins and Narrative Openings', 409 Note the lack of 'wonders' with reference to Philip however.

<sup>348</sup> See Exod. 7:3, 9, 11:9; Deut. 4:34, 6:22, 7:19, 11:3, 13:2, 26:8, 28:46, 29:2, 34:11; Esther 10:9; Pss. 77:43, 104:27, 134:9; Wis. 8:8, 10:16; Isa. 8:18, 20:3; Jer. 39:20; Bar 2:11; Dan 4:37. Blumhofer, 'Luke's Alteration of Joel 3.1-5 in Acts 2.17-21', 511.

<sup>349</sup> For Exodus themes in the New Testament more generally see Fred L. Fisher, 'New and Greater Exodus: The Exodus Pattern in the New Testament', *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 20, no. 1 (September 1977): 69-79. For Exodus themes more specifically in Luke-Acts see Jindřich Mánek, 'New Exodus [of Jesus] in the Books of Luke', *Novum Testamentum* 2, no. 1 (January 1957): 8-23; David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

performed by Jesus and his followers function as evidence of the eschatological salvation now present in these 'last days'.

The apocalyptic elements of blood, fire, smoky mist, and the transformation of the sun and moon in 2:19-20 also invite different interpretations. They might possibly refer to the events associated with the destruction of Jerusalem,<sup>350</sup> or perhaps they should be read in light of the cosmic disturbances surrounding Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>351</sup> However, due to the slippery nature of apocalyptic language and imagery we might be wrong to press too firmly for a literal fulfilment of every aspect of Joel's prophecy. For, as Robert Sloan states, 'an overly literalistic stricture upon Luke's literary capacity for interpreting the Joel text ignores the use and function of apocalyptic language in both Old and New Testaments'.<sup>352</sup> Therefore, in light of the oblique nature of apocalyptic language and the different possible options regarding their fulfilment, perhaps we might be best served by suggesting that all of these possible references may have been in Peter's mind when he drew upon Joel for an interpretation.<sup>353</sup>

Peter ends his quotation of Joel with the statement that 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (2:21). This is a fitting climax, for if it is true that the eschatological events prophesied by Joel have truly arrived then there is a corresponding need to respond appropriately by calling on the name of the Lord for salvation.<sup>354</sup> At this point in the speech there is no reason to understand the identity of the Lord who grants salvation to be anyone other than YHWH. However, the speech takes an immediate and decidedly Christological turn here which suggests that Schnabel is right to state the Peter's use of Joel is not just to explain 'the audio-visual phenomena

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<sup>350</sup> See the mention of earthquakes, famines, plagues and 'dreadful portents (*phobetron*) and great signs (*sēmeion*) from heaven' in 21:11, as well as the 'signs (*sēmeion*) in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves' in 21:25. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: a commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Christopher R. Matthews, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 20.

<sup>351</sup> Luke 23:44-45 describes darkness coming over the whole land for three hours in the middle of the day, an event which closely resembles Joel's talk of the 'sun being turned to darkness'.

<sup>352</sup> Sloan, "'Signs and Wonders'", 236.

<sup>353</sup> Sloan argues that the 'larger salvation-historical horizon' of the speech that is focused on God's mighty deeds (2:11), especially those accomplished in and through Jesus' life, death and resurrection (2:22,24,32-33,36,39), constitute the grounds by which to understand the wonders and signs. Sloan, 237-38. For a similarly comprehensive understanding see Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 185; Schnabel, *Acts*, 138-39.

<sup>354</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 144.

and the miraculous speaking of unlearned languages, but primarily to explain the significance of Jesus'.<sup>355</sup>

## Psalm 16

The validity of Schnabel's observation is underlined as immediately following the Joel quotation Peter describes how the people, despite witnessing God working powerfully through Jesus, still had him put to death (2:22-23). However, he argues that even this heinous act was part of the outworking of a divine plan that culminated in Jesus being raised from the dead (2:24). In speaking of Jesus' resurrection, Peter draws upon Psalm 16:8-11 (15:8-11 LXX) to describe how God freed Jesus from death precisely 'because' (*kathoti*)<sup>356</sup> it was 'impossible for him to be held in its power'.<sup>357</sup> The crucial line of the quotation<sup>358</sup> states that God 'will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption', and is bracketed on either side by expressions of confidence and trust in God's continued care and protection.<sup>359</sup>

In his analysis of Peter's use of Psalm 16, Trull argues that Peter gives five reasons why this Psalm should be read and understood messianically and not in reference to David:<sup>360</sup> the first is that the Psalm describes physical resurrection, which patently could not refer to David because he had died, was buried, and his tomb still stood among them (2:29); the second is that David was a prophet and therefore able to speak authoritatively concerning the future Messiah (2:30);<sup>361</sup> the third is David's confidence in God's oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne (2:30, cf. Ps. 132:11; 2 Sam 7);<sup>362</sup> the fourth, which is closely associated with both the second and third reasons, is that David can speak of the Messiah because he has been granted explicit 'foresight' (*prooraō*) of his resurrection; it is this specific foresight, according to

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<sup>355</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 140.

<sup>356</sup> The term '*kathoti*' is used only six times in the entire NT and is found only in Luke-Acts (Luke 1:7, 19:9; Acts 2:24, 45, 4:35, 17:31). Gregory V. Trull, 'Peter's Interpretation of Psalm 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25-32', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161, no. 644 (October 2004): 437.

<sup>357</sup> That the quotation from Psalm 16 is linked to Peter's argument concerning Jesus' resurrection can be seen from his use of '*gar*' (for) in 2:25 that links the two sections.

<sup>358</sup> That this is the key verse can be seen from its repetition in 2:31. Bock, *Acts*, 123.

<sup>359</sup> Pss. 16:8-9-Acts 2:25-26, Pss. 16:11-Acts 2:28.

<sup>360</sup> For an expanded discussion of each of these five points see Trull, 'Peter's Interpretation of Psalm 16', 439-48.

<sup>361</sup> For David as a prophet see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'David, "being Therefore a Prophet" (Acts 2:30)', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (July 1972): 332-39.

<sup>362</sup> Trull writes that 'according to Peter, Christ's resurrection was necessary in order for Him to rule on the throne promised to David'. Trull, 'Peter's Interpretation of Psalm 16', 443.

Trull's fifth point, that was chronicled by David in Psalm 16:10 when he wrote that the Messiah 'was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption' (2:31).<sup>363</sup> The logic of the argument appears to be clear: David spoke prophetically in this Psalm that the Messiah would be raised from the dead; Jesus has been raised from the dead, and therefore Jesus must be the Messiah.<sup>364</sup>

The foundation upon which Peter's argument stands is Jesus' bodily resurrection, and the reality of this event is emphasised as Peter says that it was precisely 'this Jesus [that] God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses' (2:32). For those who had seen the empty tomb and the risen Jesus (24:1-12, 37-41), who had touched his body (24:39), who had eaten with him (24:42-43), and who had been given 'many convincing proofs' of his resurrection (Acts 1:3), now functioned as witnesses of such things and therefore his claim to be the Messianic Son of David.

#### Psalm 110

Following this, Peter circles back once more to the phenomena of Pentecost to explain that Jesus, 'being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, has poured out this that you both see and hear' (2:33).<sup>365</sup> Turner notes that for Peter to state that it is Jesus who has poured out God's Spirit, he 'takes the reader beyond anything Judaism conceived of the messiah',<sup>366</sup> for Jesus becomes as it were 'Lord of the Spirit'.<sup>367</sup> The radical nature of this claim, Turner argues, 'would thus have been quite sufficient to guarantee that Jesus should be acknowledged as "Lord", and that in its transcendent sense'.<sup>368</sup>

Having mentioned Jesus' exaltation at God's right hand, Peter now quotes Psalm 110:1 to demonstrate that Jesus has not only been raised from the dead, he has also been

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<sup>363</sup> What is important to note here is there are subtle but significant changes made to the quotation. The first is that the verbs are now presented in the past tense to demonstrate their fulfilment, and the second is that 'your holy one' has been replaced with 'his flesh' in order to emphasise bodily resurrection. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 149.

<sup>364</sup> Donald H. Juel, 'Social Dimensions of Exegesis: The Use of Psalm 16 in Acts 2', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (October 1981): 545-50.

<sup>365</sup> 'The conjunction 'ouv' (therefore) in this context indicates that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is the consequence of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation'. Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2011), 130. It might also suggest that Peter understood Psalm 16 as pointing toward Jesus' enthronement at God's right hand, which is made explicit in Psalm 110.

<sup>366</sup> Turner, *Power from on High*, 277.

<sup>367</sup> Turner, 28-29.

<sup>368</sup> Turner, 278, 304-6. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 151.

enthroned at God's right hand in heaven (cf. Luke 1:32-33).<sup>369</sup> Jesus himself had earlier utilised the ambiguity of the two 'lords' of Psalm 110 in his conflict with the religious leaders in order to open up the 'rigid limitations of people's expectations'<sup>370</sup> to an understanding of Jesus' lordship that embraces but also transcends traditional Davidic messianic categories.<sup>371</sup> Jesus' exploitation of this ambiguity allows him to hint toward a self-understanding that is in some mysterious way akin to the very Lordship of YHWH Himself.

This lofty assertion is then strengthened when related back to Acts 2:21 and the climactic phrase 'then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved'. For, as mentioned above, the 'Lord' in the Joel quotation referred to YHWH,<sup>372</sup> but given the nature of Peter's subsequent address, Keener is surely correct when he suggests that 'Peter's sermon expounds at length on this final line from Joel, arguing that the Lord's name on which his hearers must call in this salvific era is Jesus'.<sup>373</sup> That it is Jesus' name that people are to invoke for salvation can be demonstrated by the fact that Peter summons those who respond to his message to repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ (2:38) and later proclaims that 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved' (4:12).

The climax of the speech comes in 2:36 where Peter, summing up his argument, states 'therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified'. With God said to have 'made' (*poieo*) Jesus Lord and Messiah, we should reject any sense of adoptionism<sup>374</sup> here, but rather agree with Peterson's nuanced words when he writes 'just as there are several important stages in the life of a king, from birth as heir to the throne, to anointing, to

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<sup>369</sup> Max Turner demonstrates that the spatial picture and terminology concerning Jesus' ascension to God's right hand in heaven is persuasive in understanding the passage as 'raised to' rather than 'raised by' God's right hand. Turner, *Power from on High*, 275.

<sup>370</sup> John Nolland, *Luke. 18:35-24:53* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 974.

<sup>371</sup> 'In fact, Jesus provides no immediate resolution of the enigma he poses, though he does hint through his exegetical riddle that the better category for making sense of the Messiah is "Lord" (cf. 2:11)'. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 723.

<sup>372</sup> Kevin Rowe navigates this tension by proposing that 'Lord' now includes both YHWH and Jesus. C. Kevin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111-12.

<sup>373</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2012, 920.

<sup>374</sup> For a refutation of adoptionism see C. Kevin Rowe, 'Acts 2.36 and the Continuity of Lukan Christology', *New Testament Studies* 53, no. 01 (January 2007): 37-56.

actual assumption of his throne, so it is with Jesus in Luke-Acts'.<sup>375</sup> In his ascension, Jesus has assumed his throne in heaven, and it is from here that 'he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end' (Luke 1:32-33).<sup>376</sup>

### Summary

If Peter's speech is given as a response to the people's question regarding the meaning of Pentecost, then the message of Jesus, especially his exaltation, must be understood as central to such an answer. For whilst Jesus' death meant that God's kingdom agenda had been threatened, his subsequent resurrection and enthronement at God's right hand in heaven, vindicated his radical jubilee message and established him in a place of supreme authority. The crucial role of Christology in this text is evidenced in the scriptures that Peter appeals to throughout his address. The Joel quotation, which initially helps to explain the unusual phenomena, climaxes with a summons to call on the Lord for salvation, whilst Psalm 16 presents Jesus as the resurrected messiah, and Psalm 110, as the ascended Lord. These two identities are then brought together as the climax of the entire speech states that 'God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah' (Acts 2:36).

### Response

Following Peter's speech, the people are said to be 'cut to the heart' and ask Peter and to the other apostles a second question, "what should we do"? Schnabel notes that Peter's response to their question consists of two exhortations and two promises: the exhortations are for the people to repent and be baptised, whilst the promises relate to the forgiveness of sins and the receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).<sup>377</sup> It was suggested earlier that Luke places programmatic material at the beginning of his narratives and therefore the elements mentioned here might be considered normative for an appropriate response.<sup>378</sup> Therefore, Joel Green suggests that we should take 'with the greatest seriousness the pattern-setting words of Peter in Acts 2:38 – so that even when Luke does not enumerate each item of human response ... those responses and salvific gifts are to be presumed present unless we are given explicit reason to think

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<sup>375</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 153.

<sup>376</sup> Turner argues that his reign over Israel truly begins at the ascension. Turner, *Power from on High*, 295.

<sup>377</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 141.

<sup>378</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 170.

otherwise'.<sup>379</sup> Therefore, whilst Luke does present differing patterns of response and reception of gifts elsewhere in Acts,<sup>380</sup> we might cautiously regard these anomalies as the exceptions that prove the rule.<sup>381</sup>

## Repentance

The first exhortation that Peter gives to his listeners is for them to repent, and in calling them to such a response, he is standing in continuity with the proclamation of both John the Baptist (Luke 3:3,8) and Jesus (Luke 5:32, 10:13, 11:32). He is also presented as being faithful to Jesus' commission to his disciples in Luke 24:47 that 'repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem'.<sup>382</sup>

In our earlier analysis, it was suggested that within Israel's traditions repentance concerned a general turning away from sin and back to God in covenant faithfulness. Here in Acts, in the aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, repentance takes on a more definite form, for Peter has specifically accused his audience of crucifying and killing the one attested by God.<sup>383</sup> This is no small matter, for 'involvement in the crucifixion of the Messiah whom God raised from the dead and who shares God's throne is a serious sin against God'.<sup>384</sup> Green notes that God's reversal of the people's judgement toward Jesus and his exalting him as their Lord and Messiah demanded a 'radically different understanding of the world than that held previously'.<sup>385</sup> It would, as Peterson

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<sup>379</sup> Green, 'From "John's Baptism" to "Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus"', 161.

<sup>380</sup> For instance in Acts 8:4–25 water baptism precedes reception of the Spirit, whilst in Acts 10:44–48 the situation is reversed, and on other occasions the two appear to happen simultaneously (Acts 8:38–39). Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 154–55.

<sup>381</sup> Graham Twelftree understands 2:38 as programmatic since this is the only place in Acts where repentance, water baptism, faith, forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit, are all mentioned together. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 86.

<sup>382</sup> For a discussion regarding how Luke's commissioning scene in Luke 24 repeats and reinforces major themes from the Gospel and prefigures those in Acts, see Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 194–98.

<sup>383</sup> The call for repentance for participation in Jesus' death is repeated throughout the section focused on Jerusalem. See Acts 3:14, 4:10–12, 5:30–32, 7:51–53. Cf. 10:39–40, 13:27–30.

<sup>384</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 161.

<sup>385</sup> Joel B. Green, 'Doing Repentance: The Formation of Disciples in the Acts of the Apostles', *Ex Auditu* 18 (2002): 8–9. For this as a recurring theme in Acts see 2:22–36, 3:13–15, 4:10–12, 5:30–32, 7:51–53, 10:39–40, 13:27–41.

notes, mean a ‘radical reorientation of life with respect to Jesus’,<sup>386</sup> which lies at the heart of what repentance means in this context.<sup>387</sup>

Nave notes that ‘as the message of repentance moved out of Jerusalem and was no longer directed toward those who had denied and murdered Jesus, the expressed rationale for repentance also began to change’.<sup>388</sup> For example, when addressing Gentiles, Paul knew that he had to first address theological,<sup>389</sup> rather than christological claims,<sup>390</sup> whilst maintaining the goal of articulating what God has done in and through Jesus.<sup>391</sup> So whether it is Jew or Gentile being addressed,<sup>392</sup> it is clear that God ‘now commands all people everywhere to repent’ (17:30, cf. 20:18-21), which includes a commitment to live a life marked by ‘deeds consistent with repentance’ (26:20, cf. Luke 3:8, 13:6-9).

## Baptism

The second imperative that Peter demands of the people is baptism, and more specifically, baptism ‘in the name of Jesus’.<sup>393</sup> It is the element of Jesus’ name that completely distinguishes Christian baptism from other ritual ablutions, and is described by Schnabel as ‘a completely new, unprecedented feature of immersion’.<sup>394</sup> For whilst it is probably the case that Christian baptism should be understood as a development

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<sup>386</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 154.

<sup>387</sup> This is not to suggest that repentance here does not also include turning away from more general sins, but the overwhelming focus of this context is God’s reversal of their judgment of Jesus and is therefore the primary sin for which the people need to repent. For a perspective on the wider need for repentance and forgiveness see Christoph W. Stenschke, ‘The Need for Salvation’, in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I Howard Marshall and David L. Petersen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 125–44.

<sup>388</sup> Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 205–6.

<sup>389</sup> 14:15-17, 17:22-30.

<sup>390</sup> Stenschke notes that neither speech in Acts 14 or 17 explicitly mentions Jesus. Christoph W. Stenschke, ‘The Biography of Jesus in the Missionary Speeches of Acts’, *Swedish Missiological Themes* 99, no. 3 (2011): 270.

<sup>391</sup> Stenschke also notes that mention of Jesus appears ‘indirectly or directly in the narrative context prior to the speeches’. See 14:7,9, 17:18,31. Stenschke, 270.

<sup>392</sup> For calls for Jews to repent (*metanoēō*) see Acts 2:38, 3:19,26 (*apostrophō*), 5:31, 11:18. For calls for Gentiles to repent (*metanoēō*) see Acts 14:15 (*epistrophō*), 17:30, 26:20.

<sup>393</sup> Luke uses three different prepositions regarding Jesus’ name (*en*, *eis*, *epi*) but there appears to be no real difference between their uses. ‘*Epi*’ (because, unto) is found in 2:38, ‘*eis*’ (into) in 8:16, 19:5, and ‘*en*’ (in) only in 10:48 with regard to either the name of Jesus Christ or the Lord Jesus. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 182–83.

<sup>394</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 163.



from John's baptism,<sup>395</sup> Hurtado argues that neither John,<sup>396</sup> nor any other Jewish group of the time, practiced a rite that meant 'invoking the name of any "divine agent" figure'.<sup>397</sup> This 'name', according to Hartman, 'referred to an authority behind the rite who conferred significance on the rite and made the formula meaningful',<sup>398</sup> and thus, 'baptism takes its meaning from the Jesus in whom Luke and his readers believe'.<sup>399</sup>

Of note is the fact that Luke only uses the passive verb form for baptism in conjunction with the name of Jesus,<sup>400</sup> which suggests that this baptism 'was in the earliest time a baptism "for the sake of" the Lord Jesus and therefore in submission to Him as Lord and King'.<sup>401</sup> The call to respond in submission to Jesus would then fit perfectly within the context of Peter's message regarding Jesus' exalted status. Also significant is Acts 22:16, when Paul recounts Ananias telling him to 'get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name'. The close association here between 'baptism' and 'calling on Jesus' name', causes Peterson to suggest that the latter aids in interpreting the former, in that both signify 'faith and obedience directed towards Christ'.<sup>402</sup> If this is the case, and 'the formulation "in the name of" names the one on whom people call',<sup>403</sup> then baptism in the name of Jesus in 2:38 should be understood in relation to 2:21 that states 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Acts 2:21, Joel 2:32).<sup>404</sup> Thus, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, who is also the Lord, is part of the matrix of actions by which Peter summons the people to 'save [them]selves from this corrupt generation' (2:40; cf. Deut. 32:5).

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<sup>395</sup> Justin Taylor writes, 'the formula used – with the important addition of "in the name of Jesus Christ" – is identical with that used about the baptism preached by John in Luke 3:3; this implies a continuity of rite, which acquires a new significance'. Justin Taylor, 'Max Weber Revisited: Charisma and Institution at the Origins of Christianity', *Australian E-Journal of Theology* 19, no. 3 (December 2012): 206.

<sup>396</sup> See Luke 3:3,16, 7:24-28, 20:1-8; Acts 1:4-5, 10:37, 11:16, 13:24-25, 18:25, 19:1-5.

<sup>397</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003), 202.

<sup>398</sup> Lars Hartman, *Into the Name of the Lord Jesus' Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1997), 45.

<sup>399</sup> Hartman, 132.

<sup>400</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2012, 982; Schnabel, *Acts*, 161–62. The only exception is 22:16, which is in the middle voice, that exhorts Paul to accept baptism. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 86.

<sup>401</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 101–2.

<sup>402</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 603.

<sup>403</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 163.

<sup>404</sup> Marion Soards supports this connection by noting that the ending of Peter's address in 2:38 echoes themes from the Joel quotation so that baptism in the name of Jesus in 2:38 refers to calling on the name of the Lord in 2:21, the promise of the Spirit in 2:38 echoes similar sentiments in 2:17-18, and the exhortation to be saved in 2:40 once again links back to 2:21. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts*, 31.

In obeying the call to distance themselves from their unbelieving brethren through faith and baptism, the people are added to the community (2:41) and find themselves as 'belonging to a remnant community of Jewish converts'.<sup>405</sup> The ecclesial consequences of baptism demonstrated here, highlights the initiatory dimension of the rite not yet mentioned. Hartman, in noting Luke's use of passive verbs in relation to baptism, draws attention to the fact that it not only implies submission to Jesus, but also that it is a rite performed upon converts by other members of the community.<sup>406</sup> The implications of this insight are articulated by Twelftree when he suggests that baptism in Acts is 'a means of joining and being accepted or acknowledged by the existing followers of Jesus'.<sup>407</sup> Thus, those who submitted to such a baptism became part of 'a distinguishable sect within Judaism',<sup>408</sup> one marked by the name of Jesus.

### Forgiveness of Sins

If repentance and baptism are the two imperatives of Peter's answer to the crowd's question 'what shall we do', then the first promise that is given in response to those who undertake such actions is the forgiveness of their sins. Having acknowledged that forgiveness is a key motif for Luke,<sup>409</sup> with the term 'forgiveness of sins' appearing at critical moments in his narrative,<sup>410</sup> its appearance here at the beginning of Acts should not surprise us. The focus of this forgiveness, much like the call to repentance, might be understood here as pertaining both to sins in general, but also to the people's complicity in Jesus' murder.<sup>411</sup>

Throughout Acts, and especially in the speech material, forgiveness of sins is often linked to repentance<sup>412</sup> and an obvious reason for this can be found in Jesus' commission

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<sup>405</sup> Robert Wall, 'Israel and the Gentile Mission in Acts and Paul', in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 447.

<sup>406</sup> Hartman, *'Into the Name of the Lord Jesus' Baptism in the Early Church*, 130.

<sup>407</sup> Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 86.

<sup>408</sup> Keener notes that other groups such as the Pharisees and Saducees practiced ritual immersions, and that the Essenes had an initial immersion upon entrance into the community but this was followed by many others, and therefore the closest comparison he suggests is Proselyte baptism which he suggests predates the Christian practice. Keener, *Acts*, 2012, 975–84.

<sup>409</sup> See 1:77, 3:3, 4:18-19, 5:20-21, 23-24, 7:47-49, 11-4, 12:10, 17:3-4, 23:34; Acts 2:38, 5:31, 8:22, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 858.

<sup>410</sup> See Luke 1:73, 3:3, 24:47; Acts 2:38, 5:31, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18.

<sup>411</sup> Stenschke, 'The Need for Salvation', 132–35.

<sup>412</sup> See Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 10:43, 11:18, 26:18. It is also often linked with 'faith' (*pisteuō*), see Acts 10:43, 13:38-39, 15:8-9, and 26:18. For a helpful article with these references see Robert H. Stein, 'Baptism in Luke-Acts', in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 35–66.

to the disciples in Luke 24:44-49 where he explicitly states that ‘repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be preached to all nations in his name’.<sup>413</sup> Given this, Luke’s mention of Peter (Acts 2:38; 3:19), the apostles (5:29-31), and Paul (17:30; 20:21; 26:20) preaching exactly these things from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, should be understood as his way of demonstrating their faithfulness to this commission.<sup>414</sup>

Whilst it is clear from Acts that forgiveness of sins is granted on the basis of both repentance<sup>415</sup> and faith,<sup>416</sup> what is more contentious is its relationship to baptism. Whilst some question whether baptism has any relationship at all to forgiveness,<sup>417</sup> the natural and perfectly legitimate reading<sup>418</sup> describes baptism as precisely ‘for’ (*eis*) the forgiveness of sins. The ‘*eis*’ here can denote either ‘cause’ or ‘purpose’, but ‘purpose’ is the predominant use in the New Testament.<sup>419</sup> Earlier, in Luke’s Gospel, John the Baptist also offered a baptism for (*eis*) the forgiveness of sins and it appears clear that it was presented as resulting in, and not flowing from, divine forgiveness. This may be demonstrated in that his baptism was offered under the shadow of imminent judgement, that there was a current prophetic expectation of an eschatological cleansing from sin, and that he viewed the people’s status as those in dire need of such mercy.<sup>420</sup> But might this also be the case here in 2:38? A clue to this answer might be found by appealing to Acts 22:16 again where there is a clear relationship between

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<sup>413</sup> The best textual evidence suggests the reading ‘baptism of repentance for (*eis*) forgiveness’ rather than ‘baptism and (*kai*) repentance’. But Carter, on the understanding that repentance is a gift from God in 5:31, opts for ‘repentance and forgiveness’ Carter, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 320–21.

<sup>414</sup> Joel B. Green, ‘Conversion in Luke-Acts: The Potential of a Cognitive Approach’, *Consultation on the Use of Cognitive Linguistics in Biblical Interpretation, Conversion in Luke-Acts (SBL)*, 2006, 53.

<sup>415</sup> See the above examples from Peter, the apostles, and Paul.

<sup>416</sup> See Acts 10:43, 13:38-39, 15:8-9, 26:18. Stein, ‘Baptism in Luke-Acts’, 48–49.

<sup>417</sup> McIntyre argues that because ‘repent’ and ‘your sins’ are in the plural but ‘baptised’ is singular, the offer of forgiveness can only relate to repentance and not baptism. Luther B. McIntyre Jr, ‘Baptism and Forgiveness in Acts 2:38’, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 609 (January 1996): 53–62.

<sup>418</sup> For the argument that third person singular imperatives can be used in conjunction with a second person plural imperative so that ‘repent’ and ‘baptised’ might be related together see Carroll D. Osburn, ‘The Third Person Imperative in Acts 2:38’, *Restoration Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1983): 81–84; Ashby L. Camp, ‘Reexamining the Rule of Concord in Acts 2:38’, *Restoration Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1997): 37–42; R. Bruce Compton, ‘Water Baptism and the Forgiveness of Sins in Acts 2: 38’, *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (1999): 3–32; J.W. Roberts, ‘Baptism for Remission of Sins -- a Critique’, *Restoration Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1957): 226–34.

<sup>419</sup> The presence of a ‘causal’ use of ‘*eis*’ is a complex and tricky subject. For debate on the subject see Mantey, ‘The Causal Use of *Eis* in the New Testament’; Ralph Marcus, ‘On Causal *Eis*’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 70, no. 2 (June 1951): 129–30; Ralph Marcus, ‘The Elusive Causal *Eis*’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71, no. 1 (March 1952): 43–44; J.C. Davis, ‘Another Look at the Relationship between Baptism and Forgiveness of Sins in Acts 2:38’, *Restoration Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1981): 80–88.

<sup>420</sup> See the earlier discussion regarding John’s baptism on page sixteen, especially footnote eighty-five. See also Webb, *John the Baptist and Prophet*, 186–87. Mantey, ‘The Causal Use of *Eis* in the New Testament’, 48.

Paul's baptism in water and the resulting washing away of his sins.<sup>421</sup> Consequently, if it is demonstrated that baptism results in the forgiveness of sins in this instance, then it seems reasonable to conclude, despite the ambiguity, that the same holds true for our text. In light of this, we might agree with Dunn when he states that 'the primary link is between repentance and forgiveness, with baptism as the medium by which the repentance is expressed'.<sup>422</sup>

### Gift of the Spirit

The second promise for those who repent and are baptised is that they will receive 'the gift of the Holy Spirit' (*tēn dōrean tou hagiou pneumatos*). The topic of the Spirit in Luke-Acts is an important, if not controversial one, and too much ink has already been spilled to even begin to address all the issues that are involved. Even so, perhaps we might still be bold enough to attempt to outline some of the major issues involved in order to draw out the salient points.

It is worth beginning with what appears to be something of a consensus, which is that for Luke 'the Spirit is most characteristically what Jewish believers probably would have called the "Spirit of prophecy"; in Acts especially as an "empowering for witness"'.<sup>423</sup> That Luke emphasises the empowering nature of the Spirit can be seen from the following: firstly, the immediate context of texts like Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8 highlight the theme of empowerment; secondly, a comparison of Jesus' reception of the Spirit (Luke 3:21-22, 4:18-19) and that of the disciples (Acts 2:4-11, 14-36) suggests that both are concerned with equipping for mission;<sup>424</sup> thirdly, Peter's quotation of Joel clearly highlights the Spirit as the source of prophetic unction by repeating the phrase 'shall prophesy' in 2:17-18, and by describing the resulting phenomena in terms of visions and dreams; fourthly, the emphasis on the prophetic empowering of the Spirit

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<sup>421</sup> For cleansing as symbolic of forgiveness see Bock, *Acts*, 661-62; Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 603; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 376; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary. 15:1-23:35* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 3234-35; Collins, 'What Does Baptism Do for Anyone?', 15.

<sup>422</sup> Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 33. For the view that baptism expresses repentance in Acts 2:38 see Keener, *Acts*, 2012, 975.

<sup>423</sup> Max Turner, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts', *Word & World* 23, no. 2 (2003): 147. See also Robert P. Menzies, 'Spirit and Power in Luke-Acts: A Response to Max Turner', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 49 (March 1993): 11.

<sup>424</sup> Robert P. Menzies, 'Acts 2.17-21: A Paradigm for Pentecostal Mission', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 17, no. 2 (2008): 201.

continues in the later narrative of Acts<sup>425</sup> as the Spirit gives visions and dreams,<sup>426</sup> revelatory words, instruction, and guidance,<sup>427</sup> charismatic wisdom and revelatory discernment,<sup>428</sup> charismatic praise,<sup>429</sup> and inspired preaching and teaching.<sup>430</sup> Given all this, it would be difficult to deny that prophetic enablement by the Spirit was an important aspect of Luke's Pneumatology.<sup>431</sup>

But does the focus on prophetic empowerment exhaust the role of the Spirit for Luke? Turner thinks not and critiques this position along several lines which can only be summarised here:<sup>432</sup> firstly, he suggests that there are only two, albeit important, passages that are 'unambiguously in favour of this position' (Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:8);<sup>433</sup> secondly, that 'nothing in the Jewish background would suggest the expectation of a gift of the Spirit to Israel that was exclusively missiologically orientated';<sup>434</sup> thirdly, that the Infancy Narratives,<sup>435</sup> Jesus' own experience,<sup>436</sup> and that of the early church,<sup>437</sup> suggest a broader function of the Spirit; fourthly, that Luke 'ties the Spirit very closely to

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<sup>425</sup> For the following references see Max Turner, 'The "Spirit of Prophecy" as the Power of Israel's Restoration and Witness', in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 334-35.

<sup>426</sup> See Acts 2:17 as programmatic, 7:55-56 as explicit, and 9:10-18; 10:10-20; 16:9-10 and 18:9-10; 22:17-18,21; 23:11 as most likely assumed to be Spirit-inspired by Luke (cf. 10:19, 16:6-7).

<sup>427</sup> See Acts 1:2; 1:16; 4:25; 7:51; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12,28; 13:2,4; 15:28; 16:67; 19:21; 20:22,23; 21:4,11 and 28:25.

<sup>428</sup> See Acts 5:3; 6:3,5,10, 9:31, 13:9, 16:18.

<sup>429</sup> See Acts 2:4, 10:46, 19:6.

<sup>430</sup> See Acts 1:4,8, 4:8,31, 5:32, 6:10, 9:17, 13:52, 18:25.

<sup>431</sup> For the classic Pentecostal emphasis on empowerment see Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*; Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); James B. Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991).

<sup>432</sup> For the following ideas see Max Turner, "'Empowerment for Mission'? The Pneumatology of Luke-Acts: An Appreciation and Critique of James B Shelton's *Mighty in Word and Deed*", *Vox Evangelica* 24 (1994): 114-19; Turner, *Power from on High*, 404-12.

<sup>433</sup> Turner, "'Empowerment for Mission'?", 114.

<sup>434</sup> He suggests that the emphasis in texts such as Isa. 11,32; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36-37 and Joel 3 all focus on the restoration of Israel rather than empowerment. Turner, 114.

<sup>435</sup> Here he argues that any prophetic speech found in the Infancy Narratives are directed toward God or God's people and cannot therefore be understood as bearing witness or as an empowerment for mission. Turner, 114.

<sup>436</sup> Whilst recognising that Jesus' anointing with the Spirit was 'mainly' an empowerment for mission, there are other aspects such as the instructing, guiding, and strengthening of the repentant. Turner, 114.

<sup>437</sup> Again, whilst acknowledging the role of the Spirit for mission in Acts, Turner notes passages such as 5:3,9, 6:3, 11:28, 20:28 (personal prophecies of 20:23, 21:4,11). Turner, 114-15.

conversion and baptism',<sup>438</sup> fifthly and finally, that it leads to a reductionist perspective of salvation.<sup>439</sup>

It is the last point in this list, the relationship between the Spirit and salvation that appears to develop and strengthen as the narrative progresses. For God's promise to pour out his Spirit upon 'all flesh' is fulfilled in Acts as the narrative, following the thematic outline of Acts 1:8, describes the Jews (2:1-4), the Samaritans (8:15-17), and finally the Gentiles (10:44-46), as all receiving this divine gift. It is important to recognise that this programmatic outline is concerned, not just with geographic expansion, but also with the crossing and overcoming of social and ethnic boundaries and the Spirit is central to its success.<sup>440</sup> It is precisely in those chapters that describe the word of God moving out beyond Jerusalem and being received by Samaritans (8:14) and Gentiles (11:1) that we find an emphasis on conversion/initiation in close proximity to important outpourings of the Spirit.<sup>441</sup> Zwiep argues that Luke 'being the theologian of salvation history ... is focused on periods, more or less distinct epochs, historical eras, groups of people, communities'.<sup>442</sup> He thus suggests that the corporate nature of the outpourings of the Spirit in close association with incorporation into the community means that 'the Spirit is the *identity-marker* of the New People of God' (emphasis his).<sup>443</sup>

So, in these contexts, which are so important to Luke, there is a clear focus on the corporate reception of both the word of God and the Spirit, which implies that even if there is an empowering element present, the theme of legitimisation and incorporation within the people of God should also be included.

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<sup>438</sup> He states that 'in none of these later contexts (Acts 8, 10-11, 19) is there any clear indication that the gift of the Spirit is specifically *mission* orientated' (italics his). Turner, 115-17.

<sup>439</sup> Turner, suggests that the summary passages in Acts correspond closely to salvation as described in Luke 1:71-76 and therefore salvation should be given a more comprehensive scope than that usually afforded it by scholars who hold to an 'empowerment exclusively' position. Turner, 117-18.

<sup>440</sup> Keucker speaks of the Spirit orchestrating the incorporation of the 'other' in Acts. Keucker, 'The Spirit and the "Other": Social Identity, Ethnicity and Intergroup Reconciliation in Luke-Acts', 100.

<sup>441</sup> Six references to the Spirit in Acts 8, and eight in Acts 10-11. And as Aaron Keucker notes, in sections that emphasise missionary preaching, such as Paul's evangelistic speeches in Acts 13,14,16,17, and 18, and his legal defences in Acts 22,23,24,25,26, and 27 there are no references to the Spirit. Keucker, 18-19.

<sup>442</sup> Arie W. Zwiep, *Christ, the Spirit and the Community of God: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 112.

<sup>443</sup> Arie W. Zwiep, *Christ, the Spirit and the Community of God: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 110.

## Summary

The two responses demanded in light of the reality of Jesus' enthronement were repentance and baptism. The cosmos altering event of Jesus' resurrection and ascension meant that the response of repentance took a decidedly Christological shape whereby the people had to completely reorientate their lives toward God's purposes as expressed through Jesus. The integrity of their repentance would then be demonstrated in as far as their lives expressed the fruits of repentance that aligned with Jesus' message concerning the kingdom of God. Through baptism in the name of Jesus, the people publicly acknowledged their submission to him, were washed clean of their sins, and were incorporated into the community of believers. The resulting blessing for those who undertook such actions, was the forgiveness of their sins and the eschatological gift of the Spirit.

## Community

### Introduction

Immediately following Peter's articulation of the response expected from the people, we are told that 'those who welcomed his message were baptised, and that day about three thousand people were added' to the community (2:41).<sup>444</sup> Thus, as Rowe notes, 'embracing the theological vision of the Christian gospel simultaneously creates a new cultural reality'.<sup>445</sup> This 'new cultural reality' is what we will call the early church,<sup>446</sup> and Thompson argues that the best places to gain insight into the nature of this freshly formed community is in the summary passages of Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35. He argues that it is in these texts that the reader is privileged with 'prolonged stares' rather than 'mere glimpses' into Luke's perspective 'regarding the church and ecclesiology'.<sup>447</sup> Whilst recognising the complexity of Luke's presentation of the people of God in Acts,<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> 2:41 doesn't mention 'community' but this is the clear inference from the narrative and from 2:47.

<sup>445</sup> Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 4.

<sup>446</sup> The term 'church' (*ekklesia*) is used for ease even though the term does not appear until 5:11.

<sup>447</sup> These insights reveal a 'general Lukan perspective regarding the church and ecclesiology'. 'The glimpses include Acts 14:20, 16:40, and 17:4.34, whilst the prolonged stares include 4:32-5:16, 6:1-7, 11:1-18, 19-30, 20:17-38. Thompson, 'Reconsidering the Pentecost Materials in Acts Ecclesiologically', 9.

<sup>448</sup> For the difficulty of writing on the ecclesiology in Acts see Thompson, 9; Joseph B. Tyson, 'The Emerging Church and the Problem of Authority in Acts', *Interpretation* 42, no. 2 (April 1988): 132-33; C. Kavin Rowe, 'The Ecclesiology of Acts', *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 66, no. 3 (July 2012): 259-60.

the placement of the summary passages at the head of the narrative,<sup>449</sup> and the echoes from this material in later descriptions of the church,<sup>450</sup> suggest that they carry something of a programmatic nature within the work. Therefore, it is here that we will focus our attention for this section on 'community'.

### Summary Passages

Whilst there are differences between the two summary passages,<sup>451</sup> it is argued that there is enough agreement between them to allow them to be treated together under the three main themes of the Apostles (2:43, 4:33,35), the unity of the church (2:44,46, 4:32), and the use of wealth and possessions (2:44-45, 4:32,34-35).

### Apostles

It had been argued earlier that the twelve apostles formed the core of the community that Jesus gathered around himself<sup>452</sup> and that their selection in the Gospel was symbolic of a restored Israel.<sup>453</sup> Consequently, Judas' defection, which led to the appointment of Matthias in his place (Acts 2:15-26) suggests a reconstitution of the leadership over a renewed Israel (Luke 22:24-30).<sup>454</sup> As such they are explicitly described in these early chapters as 'the apostles whom [Jesus] had chosen' (1:2, cf. Luke 6:13), as receiving direct instruction from the risen Jesus (1:1-3), and as receiving the vocation of bearing witness to him from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (1:8, cf. 4:33). Jesus' chosen leaders become his 'earthly viceroys'<sup>455</sup> and the primary means by which his teaching and rule continues to be promulgated among the people.

Their divinely ordained leadership is further accentuated by the attribution of wonders and signs to them in 2:43, for it not only reflects the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy (2:19),

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<sup>449</sup> Everett Ferguson notes that 'Luke puts representative or programmatic material early in his narratives... thus 2:42-47 [is] a summary description of the life of the early community'. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 170.

<sup>450</sup> For echoes of the summary passages in the later depictions of the church in Acts, see Richard P. Thompson, 'Christian Community and Characterisation in the Book of Acts: A Literary Study of the Concept of the Church' (Southern Methodist University, 1996), 270-446; Andy Chambers, *Exemplary Life: A Theology of Church Life in Acts* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2012), 115-36.

<sup>451</sup> For how the narrative placement of the passages shapes the emphasis of each text see Alan J. Thompson, *One Lord, One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in Its Literary Setting* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 70-74.

<sup>452</sup> See Luke 6:12-16, 8:1, 9:1,10 18:31, 22:24-30.

<sup>453</sup> Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, 33-34.

<sup>454</sup> William S. Kurz, 'Luke 22: 14-38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 2 (1985): 251-68.

<sup>455</sup> Michael E. Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel: Israel's Re-Gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke-Acts* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 253.



but also parallels God's attestation of Jesus via similar means (2:22). The community appear to have both recognised and accepted such roles for the apostles, for in 2:42 the believers were said to have been devoted to their teaching,<sup>456</sup> and in 4:35 the communal resources were said to have been laid at their feet for distribution.<sup>457</sup>

In 4:33, their faithfulness to their charge to bear witness to Jesus is evident for it is said that 'with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus'. Peterson notes that the 'great power' (*megalē dynamēi*) by which the apostles taught about the resurrection, resulted in 'great grace' (*megalē charis*) among the people,<sup>458</sup> which in turn led to the practice of radical generosity.<sup>459</sup> Thus the truth claim regarding Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, as communicated by the apostles, led to a response of submission to his rule that was evidenced by the generous use of wealth and possessions.

### *Unity*

Under such leadership, the second theme that Luke highlights in both summary passages, is that of unity. In the first summary passage 'all who believed were together' and 'spent much time together in the temple (2:44,46), whilst in the second passage 'the whole group' are said to be 'of one heart and soul (4:32).

The mention in 2:44 of the believers being 'together' (*epi to auto*) builds upon other descriptions of the church that use the same phrase in order to present the community as unified and harmonious (1.15, 2:1,44,47).<sup>460</sup> The precise meaning of the phrase '*epi to auto*' is debated, for Capper suggests that it is a technical term used by Qumran to describe their community,<sup>461</sup> whilst Johnson proposes that it should be understood in

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<sup>456</sup> This is an important aspect of their leadership. See Acts 2:42, 4:2,18, 5:21,25,28,34,42, 11:26, 13:12, 15:35, 17:19, 18:11, 20:20, 21:21,28, 28:31. Chambers, *Exemplary Life*, 66.

<sup>457</sup> Darrell Bock argues this reflects Old Testament language of obedience and submission See Josh. 10:24; 1 Sam. 25:24,41; 2 Sam 22:39. Bock, *Acts*, 215–16. Luke Timothy Johnson also draws attention to the question that arises in the surrounding narrative regarding the apostles' conflict with the religious leaders, as to who are the true leaders of the people of God. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church: The Challenge of Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), 112.

<sup>458</sup> Note the connecting '*te*' between the message of the resurrection and the grace present.

<sup>459</sup> Note the '*gar*' (for) that connects 4:33 and 4:34. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 205.

<sup>460</sup> Hays, *Luke's wealth ethics*, 192.

<sup>461</sup> Brian J. Capper, 'The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods', in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, vol. 4: Palestinian Setting (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 336.

the Septuagintal sense of ‘togetherness’.<sup>462</sup> Ferguson, after investigating these claims and other uses in early Christian literature, concludes by stating, ‘that the use of *epi to auto* for a [public worship] assembly is ultimately derived from Qumran is less than certain, but it is probable that this application does come from Jewish usage, where “together” had come to refer to “community” or “assembly”’.<sup>463</sup> This sense of unity is then further accentuated and deepened by the presence of other terms such as ‘*homothymadon*’ (together),<sup>464</sup> which in Acts, according to Walton, is used to describe ‘some sense of unity of thought or action [rather] than merely in the sense of shared location’.<sup>465</sup>

This profound unity is further described in the second summary passage when it states that ‘the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul’ (4:32). There are a few things worth noting here: the first is that, as Lenski points out, ‘what held all these people together was their one faith’,<sup>466</sup> for it is ‘those who believed’ (*ton pisteuantōn* 4:32) who were united;<sup>467</sup> the second is that this shared belief and commitment among the believers is then expressed by Luke as he describes them as being of ‘one heart and soul’ (*mia kardia kai psyche* 4:32). The language of ‘one heart and soul’ may reflect Greco-Roman friendship ideals,<sup>468</sup> but, according to Keener, it also draws upon Septuagintal language describing ‘wholehearted devotion to the Lord’.<sup>469</sup> Thus the unity of the church which had grown from the initial 120 disciples (Acts 1:15),

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<sup>462</sup> In the LXX ‘*epi to auto*’ can translate the Hebrew term ‘*yahad*’ (e.g. Pss 2:2, 4:9, 33:4, 36:38) . Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Daniel J Harrington (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 60.

<sup>463</sup> Everett Ferguson, “‘When You Come Together’: *Epi to Auto* in Early Christian Literature’, *Restoration Quarterly* 16, no. 3–4 (1973): 208.

<sup>464</sup> 1.14; 2.46; 4.24; 5.12.

<sup>465</sup> Steve Walton, “ὁμοθυμαδὸν in Acts”, in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B.W. Winter on His 65th Birthday*, ed. P.J. Williams et al. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 104.

<sup>466</sup> R. C. H Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 185–86.

<sup>467</sup> The term ‘believers’ (*pisteuontes*) is ‘Luke’s preferred designation for the community in the summary narratives’. Chambers, *Exemplary Life*, 66.

<sup>468</sup> For Greco-Roman traditions concerning friends being one heart, soul, or mind, see Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 982 (1168b), *Eth. Eud.* 766 (1240b), Diog. Laert. 5.20; Plut. *Amic Mult* 96F, *Amat.* 21:9; Cic. *Amic.* 25.92; Plato *Resp.* 4.431e. For a fuller treatment see Pieter W. van der Horst, ‘Hellenistic Parallels to the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-47’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (October 1985): 49–60; Pieter W. van der Horst, ‘Hellenistic Parallels to Acts (Chapters 3 and 4)’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35 (February 1989): 37–46.

<sup>469</sup> See Exod. 35:21; Deut. 4:29; 10:12; 11:13, 18; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10; 1 Chr. 22:19; 28:9; 2 Chr. 6:38; 15:12; 34:31; Jer. 32:41; Tobit 13:6; 2 Macc. 1:3. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*. 3:1-14:28 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1176–77. See also A. Friedl, ‘The Reception of the Deuteronomic Social Law in the Primitive Church of Jerusalem According to the Book of Acts’, *Acta Theologica* 23, no. 1 (17 October 2016): 187.

to the 3000 converts on the day of Pentecost (2:41), to our most recent count of 5000 men (4:4) is grounded in their unified allegiance to Jesus their king.<sup>470</sup>

### *Possessions*

It is clear from the narrative that it was the common allegiance to Jesus among the believers that manifested itself in the way in which they shared their wealth and possessions. In both summary passages Luke states that everyone in the community held all things in ‘common’ (*koinos* 2:44, 4:32), which reflects the language of ‘*koinonia*’ (fellowship) that the believers devoted themselves to (2:42). It was, as Chambers notes, ‘the deep unity of the believers [that] led them to consider their possessions as belonging to each other’.<sup>471</sup>

These concepts, when coupled with the idea that ‘no one claimed private ownership of any possessions’ (4:32) may seem to imply that the early church practiced some kind of primitive communism<sup>472</sup> where entrants pooled all their resources into a common purse.<sup>473</sup> However, a number of points mitigate against such conclusions: firstly, the verbs used for the selling and distributing of goods are imperfect, which suggests an ongoing action rather than a one-off renunciation;<sup>474</sup> secondly, the language of having all things in common is further defined in 2:45 and 4:34-35 in terms of the occasional selling and distributing of goods as needs arose (2:45, 4:35);<sup>475</sup> thirdly, the examples of Barnabas, and Ananias and Sapphira in 4:32-5:11 suggest that people only sold a portion of their resources, rather than relinquishing everything they had (4:37, 5:1,4);<sup>476</sup> fourthly, there is no mention anywhere in the New Testament of any formal expectation

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<sup>470</sup> Thompson, *One Lord, One People*.

<sup>471</sup> Chambers, *Exemplary Life*, 88–89.

<sup>472</sup> The term ‘primitive communism’ comes from Steve Walton’s article Steve Walton, ‘Primitive Communism in Acts? Does Acts Present the Community of Goods (2:44-45; 4:32-35) as Mistaken?’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (April 2008): 99–111.

<sup>473</sup> For the strongest advocate of this position see Brian Capper’s work. For example Capper, ‘The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods’; Brian J. Capper, ‘Reciprocity and the Ethic of Acts’, in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David L. Petersen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 499–518; Brian J. Capper, ‘The Judean Cultural Context of Community of Goods in the Early Jesus Movement: Part 1’, *Qumran Chronicle* 24, no. 1–2 (2017): 29–49.

<sup>474</sup> See the verbs ‘*pipraskō*, ‘*hyparchō*’ (sell) and ‘*diamerizō*, ‘*diadidōmi*’ (distribute) in these verses. Bock, *Acts*, 152.

<sup>475</sup> Walton, ‘Primitive Communism in Acts?’, 104.

<sup>476</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 163. Seccombe highlights the fact that Barnabas would not be seen as a positive example if those entering the community were expected to renounce all possessions for it states that he only sold a field (*agros*) in 4:37. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts*, 207.

of a complete renunciation of goods upon entering the community;<sup>477</sup> fifthly, and finally, the language of ‘all things in common’ appears to reflect Greco-Roman ideas of common *use*, rather than common *ownership*, of wealth and possessions.<sup>478</sup> Therefore it appears that the early church practiced a radical, but voluntary, generosity, that was demonstrated in their willingness to sell their ‘possessions’ (*ktēma*), ‘goods’ (*hyparxis*), ‘lands’ (*chōriōn*), and ‘houses’ (*oikia*) in order to meet the needs of poorer members of the community.

The result of this radical generosity among the believers is that Luke can make the incredible statement that ‘there was not a needy person among them’ (4:34).<sup>479</sup> Using this language, Luke evokes the Deuteronomic promise that, due to God’s blessing and the peoples obedience, there should ‘be no one in need’ among the people of Israel when they enter the promised land (Deut. 15:4-8).<sup>480</sup> Because of this, Steve Walton suggests that ‘Luke presents the messianic community in Jerusalem as fulfilling the hopes and ideals embodied in the Torah for a community life in which no one was poor or in need’.<sup>481</sup>

In highlighting these three themes then, Luke portrays a community united by their faith in the message of Jesus’ rule and reign as taught and mediated by the apostles, and as reflecting this reality by the nature of their common life together. Thus, as argued elsewhere in this paper, there is a clear and fundamental symbiosis between the truth claim being made, the response demanded as a result of such claims, and the nature of the community that is consequently formed.

### Community of the King

The importance of discerning the inherent nature of this relationship can be demonstrated when one explores the potential influences upon Luke’s presentation of the church in the summary passages. For whilst it is acknowledged that Luke may be drawing upon both Greco-Roman and Old Testament sources for his presentation of the

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<sup>477</sup> In fact, when the perfect opportunity for Peter to mention such a demand arises with the people’s question ‘what shall we do’ in Acts 2:37, nothing is said concerning this.

<sup>478</sup> Hays, *Luke’s wealth ethics*, 200–211.

<sup>479</sup> NRSV and TNIV omit the ‘for’ (*gar*), which masks the relationship between the grace given and the eradication of poverty within the community.

<sup>480</sup> The link to Deuteronomy is strengthened by the fact that the term used in Deut. 15:4 for ‘needy’ is ‘*endeēs*’, is only found here in the entire New Testament. Schnabel, *Acts*, 271.

<sup>481</sup> Walton, ‘Primitive Communism in Acts?’, 105.

early church, it is argued here that it is the authoritative teachings of Jesus himself that are of primary importance.

In this regard, Tannehill makes the important observation that ‘rather than repeating the teaching of Jesus, Acts narrates model behaviour that embodies Jesus’ teachings. By their *actions* rather than their *words*, persons in Acts demonstrate various ways that Jesus’ teachings can be applied to the life of the church’ (italics mine).<sup>482</sup> Arguing along these same lines Hays writes that ‘Luke continues the ethical paraenesis of his Gospel through his depiction of the practice of the [church] community’.<sup>483</sup> As evidence for such a statement he offers the following specific examples:<sup>484</sup> positively, Jesus’ exhortations to sell property and give the proceeds to the poor<sup>485</sup> are seen fulfilled as ‘many who owned lands or houses sold them...and it was distributed to each as any had need (Acts 4:34-35); negatively, his warnings to the rich concerning the hoarding and seduction of wealth are likewise found here as wealthier members donate their resources to the community;<sup>486</sup> his summons for people to transcend social norms and welcome the outcast is reflected in the deep fellowship of the early church between the rich and the poor (Acts 2:44,46, 4:32),<sup>487</sup> and his potent example and practice of welcome through table fellowship<sup>488</sup> is expressed in the church as ‘day by day...they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts’ (Acts 2:46).

By embodying Jesus’ teachings in their common life together the early church community became as it were, ‘the sociological explication of God’s universal lordship in Jesus Christ’,<sup>489</sup> and ‘an anticipatory realisation of the life of the kingdom, in a manner consistent with the teaching of the Gospel’.<sup>490</sup>

### Restoration of Israel and Outsiders

It would be amiss at this point to fail to note that Jesus’ enthronement at God’s right hand as Israel’s king, is part of a larger matrix of themes in these early chapters that all

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<sup>482</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, ‘Do the Ethics of Acts Include the Ethical Teaching in Luke?’, in *Acts and Ethics*, ed. Thomas E. Philips (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 110. See also Robert C. Tannehill, ‘Acts of the Apostles and Ethics’, *Interpretation* 66, no. 3 (July 2012): 270–82.

<sup>483</sup> Hays, *Luke’s wealth ethics*, 211.

<sup>484</sup> For the following see Hays, 210–11.

<sup>485</sup> Luke 12:33, 18:22.

<sup>486</sup> Luke 12:16-21, 16:1-13, 19-31, 17:26-33.

<sup>487</sup> Luke 6:27-38, 10:25-37, 14:7-14.

<sup>488</sup> Luke 3:11, 14:12-24.

<sup>489</sup> Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 126.

<sup>490</sup> Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts*, 220–21.

point toward the idea of Israel's restoration. Michael Fuller argues that the mention of the Spirit, the kingdom of God, and the restoration of Israel in Acts 1:3-8, alongside the reconstitution of the twelve apostles, the enthronement of the Davidic messiah and the subjugation of his enemies, all point toward an emphasis on the restoration of Israel.<sup>491</sup> Therefore, any general investigation of the community element in these summary passages must acknowledge the specifically Jewish focus found therein. However, Alan Thompson also suggests that there is a tension between universal and particularistic concerns here, for whilst it references 'Jews' (2:5), 'Jews and proselytes' (2:11), and the 'entire house of Israel' (2:36), it also makes mention of 'every nation under heaven' (2:5), 'all flesh' (2:17), 'everyone' (2:21), and 'all who are far off' (2:39).<sup>492</sup> This tension might then be mitigated (not resolved), by David Tiede's insight that 'the restoration which the exalted Jesus is now about to inaugurate through the Holy Spirit ... is the renewal of Israel's prophetic calling in the world'.<sup>493</sup> It appears that it was precisely because of Israel's eschatological restoration under Jesus their king that the mission to the nations now took on fresh impetus (cf. Acts 15:14-21).

As the mission to the ends of the earth began to expand out from Jerusalem and encounter all sorts of 'others', the theme of inclusiveness begun in the Gospel continued to unfold. The summary passages made it clear that the early church consisted of rich and poor together in deep fellowship, and this unity in diversity only increases as the word of God continues to welcome all people to the feast.<sup>494</sup> As mentioned above, Luke highlights the inclusive nature of the gospel message by recording how whole people groups accepted the word of God,<sup>495</sup> but he also mentions a remarkable diversity of individuals who come to faith. These include priests (6:7), a magician (8:9), a royal Ethiopian court official (8:27), a seamstress (9:36-39), a tanner (9:43), a centurion (10:1), a proconsul (13:7) a merchant in fine cloth (16:14), a Roman jailer (16:27), some philosophers (17:34), some tentmakers (18:3), and a ruler of a synagogue among

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<sup>491</sup> Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel*, 258–63. See also Rebecca I. Denova, *The Things Accomplished among Us: Prophetic Tradition in the Structural Pattern of Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Bauckham, 'The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts', 2001.

<sup>492</sup> Thompson, *One Lord, One People*, 69.

<sup>493</sup> See Isaiah 49:6 in Luke 2:29-35; Acts 13:47, 26:23. David L. Tiede, 'The Exaltation of Jesus and the Restoration of Israel in Acts 1', *Harvard Theological Review* 79, no. 1–3 (January 1986): 286.

<sup>494</sup> For the word of God as overcoming all obstacles in Acts, see Jerome Kodell, 'The Word of God Grew: The Ecclesial Tendency of Logos in Acts 6,7; 12,24; 19,20', *Biblica* 55, no. 4 (1974): 505–19.

<sup>495</sup> Samaria in 8:14 and Gentiles in 11:1.

others.<sup>496</sup> For as Parsons notes 'membership in this radically inclusive community is restricted in only one way: "It shall be that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"'.<sup>497</sup>

The implications of the proclamation that Jesus is 'Lord of all' (10:36) meant that no-one, regardless of their status within society, stood outside of the realm of both his claim, and welcome. In fact, from what we have learned about the nature of the kingdom of God that both Jesus and the early church proclaimed,<sup>498</sup> it is precisely those who are considered as socially exiled and excluded that are the primary beneficiaries of such good news. Thus, 'concern for the marginalized is not only typical of Jesus, but also of the Christian community [for] in his footsteps they form a community in which the marginalized are welcomed and find a home'.<sup>499</sup> The inclusive nature of the good news, hinted at by John, and made programmatic by Jesus, is now seen to be outworked as the message of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension, is taken to the very ends of the earth.<sup>500</sup>

### Summary

In this final section on 'community', I have argued that the presentation of the church in the summary passages is an exemplary one in which their common life together should be understood as an embodiment of the message of Jesus' Lordship. Their divinely appointed leadership, their unity, and their radical use of wealth and possessions, all reflect the instructions of Jesus in the Gospel, and therefore showcase the community as an eschatological foretaste of God's coming kingdom. Whilst the surrounding context is pregnant with the theme of the restoration of Israel, there are also elements present that point toward the universal implications of the truth claims being made. Jesus is not just Lord, but Lord of all, and his offer of salvation is open to anyone and everyone who will submit to him as such. This inclusivity is then made concrete and tangible as the

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<sup>496</sup> E. Luther Copeland, 'Church Growth in Acts', *Missiology* 4, no. 1 (January 1976): 20–21.

<sup>497</sup> Parsons, 'Christian Origins and Narrative Openings', 409.

<sup>498</sup> For Jesus see Luke 4:43, 6:20, 8:1, 9:11, 16:16, among others, and for the early church see Acts 8:12, 14:22, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23,31.

<sup>499</sup> Zwiép, *Christ, the Spirit and the Community of God*, 2012, 132–33.

<sup>500</sup> The theme of 'unlikely participants' in the people of God seems to move from those considered as outcast and marginalised within Israel (the poor, captive, blind, and oppressed etc.) to those considered as such outside the borders of Israel, such as Samaritans and Gentiles. For a discussion of this shift see James A. Berquist, "'Good News to the Poor" - Why Does This Lucan Motif Appear to Run Dry in the Book of Acts?', *Bangalore Theological Forum* 18, no. 1 (January 1986): 1–16.

word of God goes out from Jerusalem and overcomes every barrier in order to welcome all, even the most unlikely of participants, to the feast.

## Conclusion

Having explored our three themes in relation to the early church, I now hope to draw together some conclusions. In examining Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost with regard to the theme of 'message', it was argued that he gave a deeply Christological answer to the people's question regarding the meaning of the unfolding events. He claimed Joel's ancient prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit was being fulfilled, that the last days were upon them as evidenced by the presence of signs and wonders, and therefore they needed to call on the Lord for salvation. The remainder of the speech is geared toward explicating the identity and importance of Jesus as the one on whom they must call to be saved. Psalm 16 is drawn upon to affirm that Jesus, by virtue of his resurrection, is the messianic son of David, whilst Psalm 110 affirms him as the Lord enthroned at God's right hand. The climax, and therefore at the core of the meaning of these eschatological events and message, is the declaration that God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah. Hopes for the long-awaited kingdom of God, which were dead and buried alongside Jesus, were also now raised to new life as Jesus emerged from the empty tomb and

The reality that they had been complicit in crucifying the one now enthroned at God's right hand struck the people to their core and they cried out 'what shall we do'? Peter's answer to this second question highlights repentance and baptism as the appropriate responses to such circumstances, with forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit promised to those who do. Repentance and baptism both spoke of submission to Jesus as Lord and Messiah and imply a corresponding commitment to align one's life with such truth claims. Carried through from the Gospel is the expectation that the integrity of such responses will be demonstrated by a transformed life, or as Paul states it, in 'deeds consistent with repentance' (Acts 26:20).

Also consistent with our earlier investigations of John the Baptist and Jesus, is that the preaching of the word of God, alongside an appropriate response of repentance, culminated in the formation of a community. Here in Acts, these ideas are clearly evident as Luke describes the people as 'welcoming the message', being 'baptised', and



then immediately 'added to the community' (2:41). In our earlier discussion in the 'community' sections of the previous chapters, it was argued that the truth claims being made, and responded to, were reflected in the particular shape and nature of the resulting communities. Here in the summary passages, Greco-Roman and Old Testament influences were acknowledged, but it was argued that the radical fellowship of the early church should primarily be understood as reflective of their submission to Jesus as Lord. Their unity, generosity, and obedience were the living embodiment of the word of God as taught by Jesus in the Gospel. And just as Jesus' message was one of good news especially for the outcast and the marginalised, so now the early church continued in that same vein as the spreading of the message out from Jerusalem meant a corresponding inclusivity regarding unlikely participants. Membership in this community being solely predicated upon allegiance to Jesus as the king of God's kingdom.

## Final Conclusion

At the outset of this paper, I suggested that throughout Luke-Acts the proclamation of the word of God demanded a response of repentance from the people that resulted in the establishment of a faithful community. I believe that the evidence presented has substantiated this claim and that we might say with confidence that for Luke, the proper response to the preaching of the word of God, results in the formation of the people of God. I will now draw together some concluding thoughts for each chapter.

### John

In the opening chapters of Luke, John the Baptist is portrayed as the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophetic voice in the wilderness that cried out, 'Prepare the way of the Lord!' Use of this text to interpret John's message to Israel spoke of the imminent arrival of national restoration and hinted toward the landscape-altering nature of the salvation that was about to burst forth. However, it is clear from John's description of the crowds as 'broods of vipers' and his warnings of 'the wrath to come,' that the people were not ready for such a visitation. Therefore, in true form to his preparatory vocation, John summoned the people to ready themselves by submitting to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

This demand, for those who welcomed his message, described an eschatological cleansing from sin and a corresponding recommitment to align one's entire life back toward the will of God. The integrity of such a response, John warns, will be tested by whether their lives are marked by generosity and justice toward their neighbour. These 'fruits worthy of repentance' are so crucial that John now highlights them as the distinguishing feature of the true people of God. It is not, John suggests, by virtue of any biological relationship to Abraham, or any privileged social status, that this eschatological community will be demarcated, but rather by a commitment to receiving and obeying the word of God.

### Jesus

Jesus, like John before him, is presented in Luke's Gospel as one who preached the word of God to Israel. In his programmatic sermon at Nazareth, he proclaimed the present

fulfilment of the eschatological jubilee promised in Isaiah 61:1-2. This heralding of the year of the Lord's acceptance meant the arrival of a time marked by the release and forgiveness from all that which enslaved and oppressed, whether that be sin, sickness or Satan. As such it was considered good news particularly for all those who, for one reason or another, found themselves excluded or marginalised by the present regime. The response that Jesus expected and demanded from his listeners is also remarkably similar to that espoused by John. This is evident in the emphasis he placed upon the need for the people to repent and to reorder their lives in conformity to the will of God. As the narrative progresses, Luke particularly highlights the outcast, marginalised, and reprobate, those to whom the message of God's acceptance was primarily directed, as particularly responsive to this good news. The openness then of these unlikely participants stands in stark relief to the religious leaders who are presented as persistently stubborn and hard hearted. These differing responses are then emphasised in the parable of the sower that presents Jesus as the one who liberally sows the word of God to all who will listen, but whose harvest is dependent upon the soil of the listeners hearts. Thus, the fracturing and division begun by John's preaching continues with Jesus, and a 'jubilee-community' of sorts begins to take greater form and gather around him. For as Jesus himself says 'my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it' (Luke 8:21).

### Early Church

Jesus' radical agenda led to his death at the hands of the religious leaders, but his subsequent resurrection and pouring out of the Spirit left the people bewildered and asking, 'what does this mean'? In response to this request for understanding, Peter appeals to God's vindication and exaltation of Jesus as Messiah and Lord as an answer. He argues that the outpouring of the Spirit is in fulfilment of the ancient prophecies of Joel, but that it is Jesus, as the resurrected Messiah of Psalm 16 and the exalted Lord of Psalm 110, that is the one who has gifted it to his people. Having had their question of meaning answered in terms of the divine vindication of the one that they were complicit in murdering, the people cry out with a second question, 'what shall we do'? To answer this second question regarding the appropriate response to such startling news, Peter points them in the same direction as John and Jesus before him, namely to repentance, and repentance as expressed through baptism. A key difference now though is that this time baptism is undertaken in the name of Jesus, which serves to once again highlight

the centrality of Jesus in God's salvation agenda and summon the people to publicly recognise and submit to him as Lord.

The result of such a response is the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Spirit, and incorporation into the community of believers. It was argued that the nature of this community was seen most clearly in the summary passages where the early church was presented as a model example of those who responded rightly to the preaching of the word of God. For in these texts, the people were said to have received the message, responded in repentance, and produced the appropriate fruits in their common life together. Their shared faith led to shared lives that embodied the very word that they had received and they functioned as it were as a living 'hermeneutic of the gospel'.

Under Jesus, the exalted and enthroned Davidic king, the restoration programme begun in Luke's Gospel is continued in Acts, and moves beyond the boundaries of Israel to seek to include all peoples everywhere regardless of traditional social boundaries. The message of the arrival of the 'year of God's acceptance' (Luke 4:19), is taken to ends of the earth as the revelation that 'God shows no partiality and accepts anyone who fears him and does what is right' (Acts 10:34-35), begins to be understood and implemented.

Maybe we might conclude this paper by noting the similarities of John, Jesus and the early church in relation to our three themes of 'message', 'response', and 'community': for all were said to have preached the word of God (Luke 3:2, 5:1; Acts 4:31); the message of each was interpreted through the lens of an prophetic text (Isaiah 40:3-5, 61:1-2; Joel 2:28-32); all demanded a response of repentance in the form of commitment to God's rule (Luke 3:3, 5:32; Acts 2:38); the preaching of each caused a division within the people of God (Luke 7:29-30, 12:49-53; Acts 2:40); and the ministry of each resulted in the formation of a community of unlikely participants (Luke 3:12-14, 14:15-24; Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-35). Therefore, as argued throughout, the proper response to the preaching of the word of God, results in the formation of the people of God.

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